

ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ALSHARARI, FAHAD

B.A. AL JOUF UNIVERSITY, 2008

M.A. YARMOUK UNIVERSITY, 2013

STRESS FACTORS THAT IMPACT SAUDI STUDENTS' ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF FACULTY,
ADMINISTRATORS', AND STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS

Committee Chair: Daniel Teodorescu, Ph.D.

Dissertation dated May 2019

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine the stressors that Saudi students experience while studying in the United States and their impact on academic performance. The study found a considerable amount of stress as a consequence of cultural differences, lack of social integration, the academic environment, and inadequate orientation. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended several strategies for improving the experiences of Saudi students at American universities. These recommendations include better interactions between the staff/administrators and students, more social events for the Saudi students and their families, and more opportunities to interact with American fellows inside and outside the classroom. The researcher also recommends that colleges and universities improve the relevance of

course and program assignments for the Saudi students as well as the administrative support, mentoring relationships, and orientation programs they provide to these students.

STRESS FACTORS THAT IMPACT SAUDI STUDENTS' ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF FACULTY,
ADMINISTRATORS', AND STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY
FAHAD ALSHARARI
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 2019

© 2019

FAHAD ALSHARARI

All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, thanks to God Almighty for giving me all inspiration and strength to undertake this research study and complete it satisfactorily. I thank my parents and siblings for their love, support throughout my life, and giving me the energy and courage to chase my dreams. Special thanks go to my wife who has always been with me and supported me to overcome all difficulties that I faced during my studies. I thank my children who have been a blessing in my life.

I would like to sincerely thank my dissertation adviser, Dr. Daniel Teodorescu, for his guidance and support throughout this study; he never hesitated to support me whenever I needed him. I am very grateful to my department adviser, Dr. Gregory, who has always been supportive and helpful to me from the first day in my program. I am thankful for her guidance, wisdom, and compassion. I am extremely thankful to Dr. Hill, the head of Educational Leadership Department, for her constant support and motivation throughout this doctoral journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Research Purpose	3
Research Questions	4
Research Significance	5
Summary	5
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Role of the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission and Vision 2030	6
Globalization and Contemporary Higher Education.....	7
Intercultural Communication	8
Issues Faced by International Students	9
Impact on Academic Performance.....	10
Cultural Differences	10
Stress Level.....	11
Satisfaction with Academic Environment	12
Language Barriers.....	13
Instructional Delivery	14

CHAPTER

	Social Integration	15
	Orientation Before and After Arrival.....	16
	Reccomendations for Saudi International Students	17
	Summary	18
III.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	19
	Theory of Variables	19
	Definition of Variables	23
	Relationship among the Variables	24
	Limitations of the Study.....	27
	Summary	28
IV.	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	29
	Research Design	29
	Description of the Setting	29
	Sampling Procedures	30
	Working with Human Subjects.....	31
	Instrumentation	31
	Participants.....	33
	Data Collection Procedures.....	33
V.	FINDINGS	37
	Description of Samples	39
	Findings of the Quantitative Analysis	41

CHAPTER

Findings of the Qualitative Analysis.....	52
Analysis of the Findings	94
Summary	102
VI. FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND	
CONCLUSIONS.....	103
Discussion of Survey Findings	103
Discussion of Interview Findings	113
Implications	126
Suggestions for Future Research	129
Limitations of the Study.....	131
Recommendations.....	132
Conclusions	134
APPENDIX	
A. Universities Represented in the Survey Sample	138
B. Stress Indicators Questionnaire.....	141
C. Interview Protocol for Faculty and Deans	147
REFERENCES	150

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. Relationship among the variables25

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Characteristics of the Student Sample	39
2. Interview Participants by Gender and Type.....	41
3. Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Differences	42
4. Impact of Stress from Cultural Differences on Academic Performance	44
5. Descriptive Statistics for Social Integration	45
6. Impact of Stress from Lack of Social Integration on Academic Performance	47
7. Descriptive Statistics for the Academic Environment	48
8. Impact of Stress from the Academic Environment on Academic Performance	50
9. Descriptive Statistics for Inadequate Orientation	51
10. Impact of Stress from Inadequate Orientation on Academic Performance	52

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today, the mitigating national boundaries have transformed the world into a global village. The globalization, the worldwide technological development, the transnational economic co-operation and an increased sense of global citizenship have led to major changes in academia (Crawford & Wang, 2016). The last few years have witnessed an increased influx of international students into American and British universities. However, the increased influx of international students has initiated fierce competition in the global academic marketplace, as these students pay hefty fees and provide immeasurable social, cultural and academic benefits to the host country (Woodall, Hiller, & Resnick, 2014). Eze and Ingelbedion (2015) reported that each international student is worth £15,000, including fees and living expenses. American and British academic industries are highly popular among international students. Since 1998, the international students' influx into American and British educational institutions has almost doubled. However, the international students coming from entirely different cultural backgrounds face challenges that directly affect their academic performance (Eze & Ingelbedion, 2015). This research study explored the issues faced by the Saudi students in American universities, analyzed how these challenges affect their academic performance, and suggested strategies to resolve the identified concerns.

Statement of the Problem

Although the growing enrollment of international students offers huge benefits to the host country and educational institution, the cultural shift, value conflict and major changes in the learning environment cause various challenges for international students (Orth, 2015). These wide-ranging factors affect the international students' academic performance, and in some cases, impact their self-confidence and perceptions towards the host country' academic environment. The challenges are more intense when a student comes from an entirely different culture (Robinson-Pant, 2009). The arrival of Saudi students into American universities has considerably increased. International Saudi students regard the active communication with local American students crucial for understanding their culture and academic environment. Therefore, it is important for universities to offer the best experience to international students to preserve their competitive advantage on the international stage. However, this effort requires an in-depth understanding of the multi-faceted factors that influence the international Saudi students' academic performance (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013).

The economic dependency of U.S. institutions on international students emphasizes the need to address the challenges that Saudi students face in American universities. It is very important to understand the factors affecting the academic performance of Saudi students, since these students come from an entirely different cultural and academic background, and many enroll in undergraduate courses without benefitting from transition training (Orth, 2015). Although previous studies have explored the possible positive and negative influence of different factors on Saudi

students' academic performance (Abukhattala, 2013), more research is required to guide the American educational institutions and policymakers on how they can address the concerns related to academic performance and help international students accomplish their academic objectives at American universities. Many research studies propose that the international students are outperformed by local students due to certain challenges, such as language issues and cultural barriers (Bailey, 2006). Some research studies argue that Saudi students face alienation and discrimination in western universities (Ghaffari, 2009). Many students fail to complete their studies due to language and cultural concerns (Williams & Johnson, 2011). It is clear from these studies that the language, economic and cultural issues affect the self-confidence of international Saudi students, and consequently influence their academic performance.

Research Purpose

The increased influx of international students into American universities, growing economic dependency of international educational institutions on tuition and fees paid by international students, fierce competition among international educational institutions for enrollments and challenges faced by Saudi students due to vast differences in academic and cultural background, motivated this research study to explore empirically the issues confronted by Saudi international students in American educational institutions. The purpose of this study was to assist administrators and faculty at American universities in enhancing the study abroad experience of Saudi students and helping them with their academic objectives in an improved academic and cultural environment.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer 10 research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to cultural differences?
- RQ2: To what extent does stress caused by cultural differences impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?
- RQ3: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to lack of social integration?
- RQ4: To what extent does stress caused by lack of social integration impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?
- RQ5: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to their academic environment?
- RQ6: To what extent does stress caused by the academic environment impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?
- RQ7: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress associated with an inadequate orientation?
- RQ8: To what extent does stress caused by an inadequate orientation impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?
- RQ9: What are the challenges that Saudi students experience on campus as perceived by faculty and administrators?
- RQ10: How can Saudi students' educational experiences be improved from the perspective of faculty and administrators?

Research Significance

The current study is important as it helps American educational institutions understand which factors affect the academic performance of international students. It will also help international students coming from entirely different backgrounds achieve their academic objectives. The literature review revealed that the support available to international students in the United States is inadequate. The study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge based on the multidimensional empirical research, as the researcher explores the opinions of a sample of students, faculty, and administrators. The empirical results offer important insights to American policymakers regarding Saudi students' study abroad experiences by identifying factors affecting their academic performance. This study can be a valuable source for the Saudi Government and the Ministry of Education and can also help Saudi students become comfortable with American universities and earn a high grade point average (GPA) during their studies.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the problem statement and explained the rationale for the empirical investigation. The researcher explored the influence of a wide range of stress factors on the academic performance of Saudi students.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the key insights emerging from the review of recent scholarly literature on the experiences of international students in the United States. The researcher employed the thematic analysis approach to present the literature insights. Firstly, the researcher discusses how the recent globalization trend has transformed students into customers. This is followed by an analytical discussion of cross-cultural communication and challenges. Lastly, the researcher reviews the literature on international students in different academic and cultural settings.

Role of the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission and Vision 2030

The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) to the United States of America is part of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC. SACM-US was formed in 1951 by the Saudi government and its major purpose was to administer the policies and programs to meet cultural and educational needs of Saudi students studying in the United States (SACM, 2018). SACM acts as an intermediary between the Saudi Kingdom and American educational institutions and its role is to resolve the science, education and culture related issues of Saudi international students (Elgimari, Alshahrani, & Al-shehri, 2017). Moreover, SACM implements national training and educational policies to help international students be successful and provide the home country with a qualified and

successful workforce. SACM also provides financial and academic support and helps Saudi international students to adjust in different academic, social and cultural environments (SACM, 2018).

Additionally, SACM collects and disseminates important information reflecting the heritage, traditions, and culture of Saudi Arabia by actively participating in social, cultural and academic activities. Recently, SACM launched the *Features of Saudi Vision 2030*. SACM links the Saudi students studying in the United States with the vision 2030 by urging them to review and promote citizenship values and ensure an active role in fulfilling the goals of 2030 vision. Saudi's 2030 vision is regarded as a roadmap to the development work that will transform Saudi Arabia into a developed, advanced, and prosperous nation. While communicating the Saudi Vision 2030, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz commented, "My first objective is for our country to be a pioneering and successful global model of excellence, on all fronts" (Freeman, Zogby, Goldenberg, & Hyman, 2016, p. 5).

Globalization and Contemporary Higher Education

Today, the globally interdependent world has entered into an era where people are having a sense of global citizenship. The mitigating global boundaries have increased the cross-national and cross-cultural mobility (Crawford & Wang, 2016). International educational institutions of the developed world are seeking to capitalize this market opportunity. Consequently, the competition for international students' enrollments has intensified. Modern educational institutions are viewing the education as a commodity, and are incurring large expenditures with the marketing and promotion of their

knowledge providing services (Woodall, Hiller, & Resnick, 2014). Students are being regarded as the customers, whose satisfaction is equally important for educational institutions, as a measure of educational quality. The exposure to the international environment equips the students with skills that are required in the modern world (Eze & Ingelbedion, 2015). Internationalization is highly beneficial for educational institutions as they can expand the tuition revenues generated from international students. Despite all of these benefits, viewing education as a commodity and students as customers has changed the basic concept of education (Crawford & Wang, 2016).

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication involves the interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds. For international students, intercultural communication is highly important for academic success (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). When international students have open and friendly communication with their native class-fellows, they gain in self-confidence, and consequently their overall academic performance improves (Rienties, Héliot, & Jindal-Snape, 2013). Intercultural communication is specifically important when students interact in an open, autonomous student-centered learning environment (Mak, Brown, & Wadey, 2014). Moreover, it also helps students adjust to a foreign culture and understand the local norms and values. Strong social ties with the local people help international students cope with the cultural shock and adjust to the host culture. It also helps them overcome the homesickness, motivates them to work hard, and accomplish their academic goals (Al Musaiteer, 2015).

Issues Faced by International Students

The review of theoretical and empirical literature has revealed various challenges that international students face when they enter in an entirely different cultural and academic environment. For example, Tran (2011) mentioned that the international students from Asian countries often face discrimination based on racial and ethnic grounds, which consequently affects their motivation to perform the best in the classroom. Houshmand, Spanierman, and Tafarodi (2014) contended that racial discrimination has a direct influence on the international students' academic performance in Canadian universities. Mak, Brown, and Wadey (2014) stated that the international students face difficulty in understanding the foreign language accent that consequently affected their performance within the classroom.

Contending on the same note, Rienties, Héliot, and Jindal-Snape (2013) stated that unfamiliarity with the local cultural norms, values and learning environment makes the adjustment process difficult for international students. Lin and Scherz (2014) characterized the difference in the academic environment as unfamiliarity with the assessment procedures, pedagogical and andragogic practices, and student-centered classroom environment. Yakunina, Weigold, Hercegovac, and Elsayed (2013) mentioned that the orientation before and after arrival can significantly lessen the impact of cultural differences; however, Rienties et al. (2013) argued that orientation is not an effective strategy until the student demonstrates the willingness to have an informal and open communication with the native students.

The following sections explain the collective impact of all independent variables on the academic performance of international students. The researcher then explains each variable and the hypothesis statements that were developed.

Impact on Academic Performance

Various studies have discussed the challenges that international students face when they enter into a different cultural and academic environment (Al-Murshidi, 2014; Lee, 2007; Tan & Winkelman, 2014). However, limited empirical evidence is available to confirm the direct impact of those factors on the academic performance of students. Lee (2007) explored empirically the influence of informal conversation of Saudi students with American counterparts and self-confidence on their academic performance. The results confirmed that open and friendly conversations with Americans lessen the fear and anxiety, and consequently improve their academic performance.

Al-Murshidi (2014) agreed and contended that the oral communication and expression significantly influence the academic performance of non-native students. When students feel comfortable in the class, they actively participate in class discussions, resulting into improved grades and better performance. Tan and Winkelman (2014) confirmed the impact of stress level, personality traits, and coping style on the academic performance of international students. The researchers collected data from 100 international students studying in Australian universities.

Cultural Differences

Li, Chen, and Duanmu (2010) analyzed the impact of cultural shock and cultural difference on the international students' academic performance. The results suggested

that the students coming from Asian countries or regions whose culture is entirely different from the United States and the United Kingdom face difficulties due to cultural shock that directly affects their academic performance. However, such negative influences could be minimized if students placed high importance on cross-cultural learning, fulfilling their parents' expectations, and healthy communication with native peers. Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) agreed and concluded that the international students from Asian and Arab regions face more difficulties than other students due to the huge cultural shock. However, the impact of this cultural shock on academic performance varied from one student to another. Overall, the wide cultural difference negatively influenced the international students' academic achievement. The empirical results confirmed the significant impact of three Hofstede cultural dimensions on social and academic adjustment, including uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and power distance.

The previous discussion suggested that when cultural difference is higher, cultural shock influences the international students' ability to accomplish their academic objectives in an entirely different cultural environment. Based on the discussion, the underlying study hypothesized that cultural difference directly influences the academic performance of Saudi students while studying in American universities.

Stress Level

This independent variable shares some relevance to the cultural difference, as higher cultural difference and inability to handle the cultural differences raises the stress level, and affects students' academic performance. Misra and Castillo (2004) confirmed empirically the effect of stress caused by different factors on the international students'

academic performance. The researchers compared American and international students and concluded that international students perceived differently various stressors and reacted differently than the native students. The findings suggested the need to consider the stress arising from cultural difference while assessing the difference in academic performance. A recent empirical research conducted by Karaman and Watson (2017) also stated that international students face more stress than American students due to different factors and have less confidence to overcome the challenges they face due to reduced external locus of control.

The previous discussion suggested that when the stress level is higher and students lack the confidence to handle stress, international students' ability to accomplish their academic objectives in an entirely different cultural environment is negatively affected. Based on the preceding discussion, the underlying study hypothesized that stress level and external locus of control directly influence the academic performance of Saudi students while studying in American universities.

Satisfaction with Academic Environment

The satisfaction with the academic environment and perceived difference from the home country's academic environment are also significant predictors of the international students' academic performance. Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers (2012) contended that when students experience a transition from a teacher-centric to a student-centric academic environment, this change affects their ability to adjust in different academic settings. Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010) proved this claim and observed that it is important to analyze the satisfaction of international students with

current academic environment compared to previous work environment, as this difference affects their ability to accomplish the academic objectives. Researchers contend that the difference in faculty interaction and communication style influences the students' satisfaction with their academic environment, which consequently affects their academic performance (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010).

The prior discussion suggested that when international students perceive the academic environment entirely different from their home country's academic environment, their ability to accomplish their academic objectives in an entirely different cultural environment is affected. Based on the above discussion, the current study hypothesized that satisfaction with the new academic environment directly influences the academic performance of Saudi students while studying in American universities.

Language Barriers

Among different predictors that influence international students' academic performance, the language barrier is one of the most extensively researched. The language barrier affects the students' ability to interact with faculty and their native peers. It also affects their ability to participate in classroom discussions (Misra & Castillo, 2004). However, the impact of the language barrier on the academic performance is moderated by the students' willingness to learn and adapt to the new culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The impact is also moderated by students' friendly relationships with native peers. Li, Chen, and Duanmu (2010) explored the influence of the language barrier on the academic performance of international students. Their results revealed that students from Asian and Arab regions face more language barriers than the students from

European students while studying in American universities. Consequently, the perceived language barriers affect their ability to perform better within classroom.

The above discussion suggested that when language barriers are higher, the international students' ability to accomplish their academic objectives in an entirely different cultural environment is negatively affected. Based on the discussion, the current study hypothesized that language barriers directly influence the academic performance of Saudi students while studying in American universities.

Instructional Delivery

A change in the mode of instructional delivery is also a factor that influences the learning outcomes of international students while studying in physically and culturally different environments (Zhang, 2016). Most of the instructors teaching in Saudi educational institutions take the central role and students obey instructions given by the teacher to broaden their knowledge (Akanwa, 2015). Conversely, in most of the American educational institutions, a student-centered approach is chosen where the teacher acts as a facilitator and learners participate actively in the class (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). The transition from a teacher-centered academic environment to a student-centered academic environment can create significant challenges for international students.

Lin and Scherz (2014) commented that Asian international students studying in western higher education institutions find it difficult to adjust in an academic environment with different modes of instructional delivery. Differences in the educational structure can affect the international students' engagement in classroom.

While contending on the same note, Zhang (2016) noted that differences in the language and the cultural settings make the transition from teacher-centered to student-centered instructional approach more difficult. Akanwa (2015) advised instructors to customize their instructional approach in order to make the transition smoother for international students coming from different educational and cultural backgrounds. Based on these insights, the researcher hypothesized that the difference in the mode of instructional delivery influences the learning outcomes of Saudi students studying in American higher education institutions.

Social Integration

Social integration is one of the most widely discussed factors in the studies on international students. Researchers contend that initial cultural shock and language differences make the social integration difficult for international students (Rienties & Nolan, 2014). In many cases, low class participation was cited as being caused by the students' inability to effectively integrate in different cultural and societal settings. Stromquist and Monkman (2014) mentioned that international students must prepare themselves to adjust in a different society with entirely different norms and values in order to have a fully productive experience. Campbell and Prins (2016) agreed and contended that international students' difficult social integration affects their academic performance. However, friendships within and outside of the class speeds up the integration process. Lee and Ciftci (2014) assessed the factors that make social integration difficult or easy, and concluded that multicultural personality, assertiveness, social support, and academic self-efficacy influence the overall social integration process

of international students in American educational institutions. Researchers further concluded that a difficult social integration influences negatively the learning outcomes of students coming from different academic, cultural, and social backgrounds (Lee & Ciftci, 2014).

Rienties and Nolan (2014) conducted a longitudinal study to assess how learning networks, friendship, and social integration between host and international students influence the overall learning outcomes. Based on the empirical insights, the study concluded that friendship and wide learning networks positively influence social integration, which in turn improves the overall learning outcomes of international students studying in different universities (Rienties & Nolan, 2014). Based on these insights, the researcher hypothesized that efficient social integration positively influences the learning outcomes of Saudi students studying in American educational institutions.

Orientation Before and After Arrival

Different researchers have discussed the importance of training and orientation while crossing national boundaries (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). However, this variable has been mainly discussed in the context of organizational settings and executives travelling for international assignments (Koo Moon, Kwon Choi, & Shik Jung, 2012). In the academic context, comparatively less empirical evidence is available to prove the effect of orientation on international students' ability to adjust in the host country's academic environment and successfully accomplish their academic objectives. This was a unique aspect of the research as the researcher applied the findings from the business literature to international academic settings. Hence, the study hypothesized that orientation before and

after arrival directly influences the academic performance of Saudi students while studying in American universities.

Recommendations for Saudi International Students

Based on the review of past theoretical and empirical literature, the current research study aimed to make recommendations that may help Saudi international students adjust in physically and culturally distant countries. Similarly, previous literature pointed to at least three recommendations that could help international students adjust better to their host country. First, international students were recommended to take language training before leaving for the international destination to overcome the language challenges and improve their spoken and listening skills. Such training would help them to overcome the language barriers (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). It was recommended that international students develop interaction with the native English speakers while in their home country to improve understanding of the accent. Secondly, students must gain adequate knowledge of cultural and societal norms and values beforehand to avoid the cultural shock. Enhanced cultural awareness can reduce the stress and improve the social integration in different cultural environments (Karaman & Watson, 2017).

Third, international students were recommended to attend the before and after arrival orientation to learn about the culture of the host country in addition to learning important academic information (Koo Moon et al., 2012; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Moreover, researchers highlighted the importance of developing interpersonal and social skills, developing new friendships and raising self-confidence in order to overcome

hesitation and make the study abroad experience more productive. It was also suggested that efficient stress management skills and low social anxiety help students during the cultural shock phase (Lee & Ciftci, 2014; Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

Students should take the initiative to gain the acceptance in different societal environments and try to highlight the similarities and respect differences while interacting with local students to create a healthy and positive environment (Rienties & Nolan, 2014). Lastly, international students were recommended to broaden their understanding of different educational structures and instructional delivery modes in order to ensure smooth adjustment in different academic environments (Akanwa, 2015; Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015; Zhang, 2016).

Summary

Overall, the review of literature suggested that the topic of the current study is multidimensional and derives its theoretical foundation from different theories. For example, economic theory explains how international students' academic performance is affected by the economic and financial issues, stress and coping theory explains how international students face difficulties during initial adjustment period, and culture learning theory explains how cultural and language barriers affect the academic performance of international students. In the context of international students, these theories offer useful insights and explain why academic performance differs based on economic and cultural grounds.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses different theories that relate to the selected variables and offers the theoretical foundation for the empirical research. First, the chapter provides an overview of the selected research design followed by theory, definitions, and relationship between selected variables. The researcher also discusses some limitations at the end of chapter.

Theory of Variables

The review of literature highlights many theories that helped the researcher to define the study variables in the chosen research context. The researcher analyzed stress across multiple dimensions, focusing on multiple stress factors. Hence, several theories provided guidance about how the selected variables might affect the academic performance of Saudi students.

Cultural Differences and Language Barriers

The theoretical support obtained from the cultural learning theory helped the researcher to define the variables *cultural difference* and *language barriers* and understand how they affect academic performance. Cultural learning theory explains how cultural and language barriers affect the academic performance of international students. Furnham and Bochner (1986) proposed the cultural learning theory to explain how

individuals adjust in a new environment and what particular challenges they face during that adjustment. The researchers highlighted that lack of appropriate language and communication skills directly influence the adjustment process in a new environment. Argyle and Kendon's (1967) social skills and cultural learning theory also proposes that when individuals lack language and social skills, they are likely to face difficulties during their adjustment to a different cultural environment. This study defined cultural difference as Saudi students' perceptions towards differences in social and cultural norms and values between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The researcher also assessed how international (Saudi) students' inadequate English language learning skills influence their ability to adjust to a different cultural environment.

Orientation Before and After Arrival to the United States

The cultural learning theory was used to develop training methods for helping individuals cope with the initial cultural shock when moving to a different cultural environment. This theory suggests that individuals can cope with the cultural shock and adjust in a different cultural environment if they have required skills and knowledge of the new culture. In the context of international students, this theory explains that training international students and giving them knowledge of their new academic environment can help them adjust better. Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992) used the cultural learning theory and highlighted the importance of effective orientation and cross-cultural training for successful adjustment to a new culture.

Oberg's (1960) cultural shock theory also explained how international students face difficulties due to change in the culture during their initial adjustment period and

how that change influences their academic performance. The theory suggests that a high cultural difference causes feelings of anxiety, rejection, loss, and lack of control. The author also noted language and communication barriers faced by individuals while experiencing a cultural shock. However, language and cross-cultural training can help international students to overcome the language and communication barriers during initial adjustment period. Based on this theory, the current study hypothesized that international students face communication and language barriers during their initial adjustment period when they are in the cultural shock stage. These barriers can be minimized by conducting an effective and detailed orientation session before they come to the United States. To obtain a clearer explanation of how orientation helps international students to cope with stress in a different cultural environment, the researcher analyzed the effectiveness of orientation programs at two different points—before arrival orientation and after arrival orientation.

Social integration and satisfaction with the academic environment

Tinto (1987) proposed the theory of student departure and shared that international students' adjustment in different cultural and institutional settings depends on the prior schooling, abilities, skills, and family background. These factors influence the students' commitment, expectation, and satisfaction with a new academic environment. Tinto (1975) proposed that when students find it difficult to integrate into different social settings, it directly affects their academic performance and raises the chances of departure. The current study derived theoretical guidance from this theory in order to operationalize the variables *social integration* and *satisfaction with academic*

environment. The researcher assessed how international students face the social integration issues due to changes in the academic and cultural environment.

Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima (1998) used the cultural learning theory and proposed that adjustment to a new culture depends on the individuals' ability to develop connections and grow a network in the new environment. Durkheim's suicide theory also explains the reasons why international students fail due to a changed social environment (Metz, 2002). These theories helped the author of this study to understand how social integration influences the academic performance of international students. The application of Austin's theory of involvement in the international student context proposes that students' academic performance and retention in a different academic environment depends on the extent to which they are socially involved and integrated (Milem & Berger, 1997). Involvement within the academic environment positively influences the academic outcomes. Based on these theories, the researcher defined *social integration* as the degree to which international students are integrated within a different social and academic environment and maintain active involvement in academic and non-academic activities. This current study has selected *social integration* and *satisfaction with academic environment* as two important determinants of academic performance with stress as the mediating variable.

Stress level

The stress and coping theory explains how international students face difficulties during their initial adjustment period. This theory is based on the psychological models that show impact of different life events (Folkman, 2001). The application of this theory

in the international students' cross-cultural adjustment context suggests that international students experience the stress due to change in the cultural and social environment; however, they must adopt a proactive attitude to cope with the stress and adjust in new social and cultural settings. The researcher derived theoretical support from social, psychological, and educational theories to explain the selected variables. Based on these theories, the researcher hypothesized that Saudi students go through a challenging adjustment process when they enter in a new academic environment in different cultural and societal settings. Various factors influence their ability to adjust in the new environment, including cultural and language barriers (connected with social skills and cultural learning theory), orientation before and after arrival to the United States (connected with cultural learning theory and cultural shock theory), and social integration (connected with theory of student departure, cultural learning theory, Durkheim suicide theory, and theory of involvement). In the next section, the researcher defines the variables for the study and explains how these variables were operationalized to answer the research questions.

Definition of Variables

Academic performance was measured by the researcher via international Saudi students' self-reported GPA.

Cross-cultural orientation, in this research study, evaluated the cross-cultural orientation before and after arrival in the United States by assessing the extent to which Saudi international students were equipped with the required language skills and knowledge of American culture and academic environment.

Cultural difference is defined as the difference in cultural and societal norms, values, and traditions. In the chosen research context, cultural difference refers to differences in social norms, values and traditions between Saudi Arabia and United States of America.

Language barriers in the chosen research context, capture the difficulties faced by Saudi international students in American universities while communicating with native students due to inadequate English language skills.

Satisfaction with the academic environment represents the Saudi students' perceptions towards the academic environment at American universities, including satisfaction with the instructional delivery modes.

Social integration represents the ability of international Saudi students to adjust and integrate within the American society through effective social, networking, communication, and interpersonal skills. Poor social integration is expected to share positive association with stress and negative association with the academic performance.

Stress level, in this research study, was evaluated by assessing the extent to which Saudi international students feel stressed, anxious, and worried in American universities due to cross-cultural differences.

Relationship among the Variables

The statistical analysis enabled the researcher to evaluate whether the selected variables share a statistical relationship with each other. The graphical representation of the theoretical framework presented in Figure 1 visualizes the relationships between the study variables.

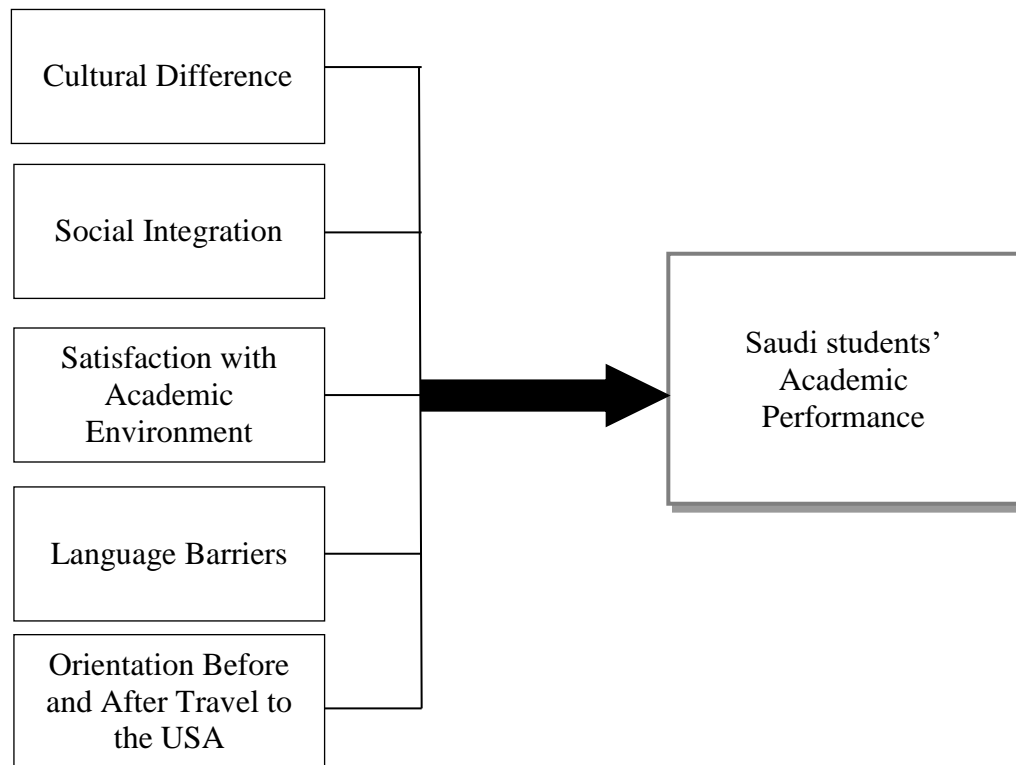


Figure 1. Relationship among the variables.

As the diagram shows, a high cultural difference increases the stress level, which negatively affects the learning outcomes of international students. The current empirical study assessed the effect that the stress caused by cultural differences has on academic performance (Li et al. 2010; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). The following hypothesis statement explains the relationship between cultural difference, stress, and academic performance.

Ho1: Cultural differences create stress for Saudi students studying in the United States which, in turn, affects negatively their academic performance.

International students' social and networking skills directly influence their ability to integrate in a different social environment. Social integration has a direct impact on the stress level and the learning outcomes of international students (Rienties et al., 2012). The following hypothesis statements explain the relationship between social integration, satisfaction with the academic environment, stress and academic performance:

Ho2: Difficulties with social integration create stress for the Saudi students studying in the United States which, in turn, affects negatively their academic performance.

Ho3: Dissatisfaction with the academic environment creates stress for Saudi students studying in the United States which, in turn, affects negatively their academic performance.

Language and communication skills influence the international students' cross-cultural adjustment and academic performance. Poor language and communication increase stress and have a negative impact on academic performance (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The following hypothesis statement explains the relationship between language barriers, stress, and academic performance:

Ho4: Language barriers create stress for Saudi students studying in the United States which, in turn, affects negatively their academic performance.

Social and cultural learning theories emphasize the importance of attending language and cross-cultural training sessions in order to successfully adjust in different cultural and social environments. When individuals have the necessary language skills and knowledge of the new culture, they are less likely to be stressed and perform better

academically (Koo Moon et al. 2012; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). In the context of international students' cross-cultural adjustment, the following hypothesis statements were developed:

Ho5: Inadequate orientation before travel to the United States creates stress for Saudi students studying in the United States which, in turn, affects negatively their academic performance.

Ho6: Inadequate orientation after travel to the United States creates stress for the Saudi students studying in the United States which, in turn, affects negatively their academic performance.

Limitations of the Study

This empirical study has some limitations that may have affected the reliability and generalizability of its findings. Firstly, the researcher collected the qualitative data (through interviews) from only one university—a minority-serving institution located in a large urban area in the Southeast. Although the findings have specific implications for the selected university, they may not apply to other settings. Secondly, mixed-method research studies are usually time and resource intensive. Strict time constraints affected the researcher's ability to collect data from a large number of students, faculty, and administrators. While the online data collection for the student survey was time effective, the use of a convenience sample also may have affected the generalizability of the findings. Similarly, qualitative studies face the low response issues as interviews take considerable time compared to close-ended surveys. The researcher utilized multiple contacts to increase the response rate and overcome these limitations. Thirdly, the

researcher focused on Saudi students studying at American universities. Therefore, the findings may have weak generalizability to other international students or Saudi students studying in countries other than the United States.

Summary

This chapter described the variables that were used by the empirical study to explore the issues that Saudi students face in American universities. The researcher analyzed how entrance into a socially and academically different environment affects their academic performance. The chapter also explained the overall theoretical framework used by the empirical study and defined and explained the variables and associated relationships based on relevant theories. In the next chapter, the researcher presents and justifies the important methodological choices that were made to collect data from the target audience.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research design selected by the researcher and the rationale for the selection. Next, the researcher describes the setting, the sampling methods, and the two instruments that were used to obtain feedback from students, faculty, and administrators. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data collection procedures.

Research Design

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods research design involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In the first stage, the researcher administered a web-based survey to Saudi students who are studying at American universities. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. In the second stage, the researcher conducted personal interviews with faculty and administrators at a minority-serving research university located in a major urban area in the Southeastern region of the United States. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed by developing themes. Both commonalities and differences in responses were identified for each theme.

Description of the Setting

Although most participants come from more than 90 universities and colleges across the United States, the qualitative component of the study was conducted only at

one institution—a minority-serving research university located in the Southeast region of the United States.

The university enrolls approximately 4000 students, the large majority of them being minority students. Approximately 400 are Saudi students. The university offers 38 areas of study across four schools: Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education, and Social Work. The university employs more than 170 full-time faculty and the student-faculty ratio is 15:1. Students can earn the following degrees: bachelor's, master's, specialist, and doctorate.

Sampling Procedures

The researcher used a convenience sample to select participants for the student survey. Convenience sample is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study. A total of 255 Saudi students studying at more than 90 universities and colleges across the United States comprised the sample for the survey (see Appendix A).

To select the participants for the interviews, the researcher used a purposive sampling method. Only faculty who currently teach or have taught in past terms Saudi students were included in the sample. Similarly, only deans/administrators in schools that enroll Saudi students were selected. The final sample included eight faculty and two administrators.

Working with Human Subjects

The researcher guaranteed anonymity to the survey participants and confidentiality to the interview participants and none of the participants were identifiable in the report of findings. In addition, the consent form for both surveys and interviews specified that all subjects voluntarily participate in the research. Subjects were also instructed that they could withdraw from the research at any point.

The study received approval from the Clark Atlanta University Institutional Review Board. In addition, the survey underwent the review of multiple Saudi student organizations, which approved and posted the survey on their social media platforms.

Instrumentation

The survey that was developed for this study included a mix of open ended questions and Likert scale questions. This is a common approach for questionnaire design in the field of survey research. The Likert scale has been found to be a reliable method of measuring opinions, behaviors and perceptions. Compared to yes/no questions, the Likert scale allows participants to have more granular ways to give feedback.

The student survey questions were grouped into the following categories: (a) cultural differences, (b) social integration, (c) academic environment, and (d) orientation before/after travel to the United States. The last section of the survey was dedicated to demographic questions. For a review of the items included in each section, see the questionnaire included in Appendix B.

For the qualitative component of the study, the researcher chose the personal interview method. The purpose of this method is to gather deeper information and

improved insight. This data collection method was selected because it provided the researcher with the ability to probe the answers of the participants, and simultaneously, observe their behavior individually. The body language defines a lot about a person's thought processes. The interview was semistructured with open-ended questions that were asked in a specific order. As with the student survey, the questions fell under four main categories of stressors: (a) cultural differences, (b) social integration, (c) satisfaction with the academic environment, and (d) orientation (see Appendix C).

The personal interview method also ensured higher response rates due to the face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, which allowed the participants to ask clarifying questions if they did not understand a question. The researcher decided to conduct personal interviews with faculty members and administrators since the sample was relatively small. This method was dependent on open-ended questions, which are a lot more tolerated via interviews because of the convenience for the participants to express their views. It might have been more difficult to express these views in written form. The personal interview also provided opportunities for the researcher to make observations of the participant's attitude.

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of interviews. The personal interview method can prove to be costly as compared to the paper-and-pencil surveys or online surveys since it involves the transcription of the recorded interviews. This method is also more time-consuming than online surveys when it comes to analyzing, categorizing, and summarizing the information.

Participants

The participants in this study were undergraduate and graduate Saudi students studying at colleges and universities in the United States. In addition, for the qualitative component of the study, the researcher interviewed eight faculty and two administrators at a research university in the Southeast region of the United States that enrolls a large number of Saudi students.

Data Collection Procedures

This research study used two data collection methods for gathering the primary data: surveys and interviews.

Procedures for the Survey Data Collection

The online survey was created through Qualtrics. This survey tool was selected because of its intuitive drag and drop interface, 100+ question types, powerful logic, and prebuilt survey templates. Survey participants could be reached wherever they were through apps, mobile devices, and chatbot. With the cloud-based survey technology, Qualtrics has revolutionized the capability of getting the data rapidly from participants through wide range of channels.

The survey was posted on the main social media outlets for the Saudi students studying in at American universities. Students were informed in the consent page that their responses would be anonymous.

The delivery of the survey via the web was selected for collecting data from Saudi students studying in U.S. universities because of its cost and time efficiencies. It is time consuming to conduct face-to-face surveys with more than 100 participants because of

geographical distances and differences in time zones. Moreover, the online method offers convenience for participants to provide feedback. Moreover, the online administration of the survey ensured the student participant's anonymity.

Across the United States, there are hundreds of Saudi student organizations (or clubs) that are approved by SACM for universities that enroll Saudi students. These organizations work for Saudi students in every university. Each organization has a Board of Directors and is completely controlled by SACM, which reports to the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education. All of these organizations have a social media platform on which to communicate, help, serve, and encourage Saudi students at their universities. In addition to these university-based organizations, there is a main organization (Saudi Students in USA) that communicates to all Saudi students who study at U.S institutions of higher education.

The survey conducted for this study was approved and posted after it went through a review process by these organizations. For the main organization (Saudi Students in USA), the researcher was asked to email to the department of editors and the department of media through his University email and provide proof that the survey was to fulfill a requirement of a degree from accredited and approved university by the Saudi Ministry of Education. Next, the researcher had to wait several days to be approved by the department of editors who then posted the survey link through different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter , Instagram, and Watsup). The same process was followed to obtain approval from the other Saudi student organizations. Approvals were obtained either from their committee or the director of academic affairs. More information about

these organizations are available at the SACM website: <http://www.sacmclubs.org/en/site/page/view/aboutsacmclubs>.

Procedures for the Personal Interviews

The data for the qualitative component of the study were collected from a group of eight faculty members and two administrators at a selected university via face-to-face, personal interviews. The following procedures guided the data collection of data via the interviews:

- The interview setting was selected so that the environment provided the least distraction and interference.
- The participants were informed about the interview setting and scheduled time through e-mail and phone calls two weeks before the interview date.
- The purpose, format, and duration of the interview were explained to the participants via e-mail two weeks prior the final interview date.
- Participants' written informed consent was obtained prior to the interview.
- One week before the interview, all the participants were personally called and asked to clarify their doubts if any regarding the research and interview process.
- During the interview process, the researcher followed the following guidelines:
 - ✓ The participants were formally introduced.
 - ✓ Prior to asking controversial matters, the researcher asked factual questions.

- ✓ The last interview question permitted the respondents to offer final suggestions or comments related to the topic.

The interviewer occasionally verified the recorder to ensure that it was working. The researcher also ensured that one question was asked at one time allowing ample time for the participant to reply with comfort and honesty. The interviewer aimed to remain as neutral as possible, while creating a positive environment to encourage honest responses. The interviewer noted the body language and appearance of the interviewee and also took notes while taping the interview.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which Saudi students experience different stressors in the course of studying at American universities. Additionally, this study investigated the students' opinions concerning the influence of these stressors on their academic performance, as measured by their cumulative grade point average. In particular, the study sought to find answers to the following 10 research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to cultural differences?
- RQ2: To what extent does stress caused by cultural differences impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?
- RQ3: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to lack of social integration?
- RQ4: To what extent does stress caused by lack of social integration impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?
- RQ5: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to their academic environment?
- RQ6: To what extent does stress caused by the academic environment impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

RQ7: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress associated with an inadequate orientation?

RQ8: To what extent does stress caused by an inadequate orientation impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

RQ9: What are the challenges that Saudi students experience on campus as perceived by faculty and administrators?

RQ10: How can Saudi students' educational experiences be improved from the perspective of faculty and administrators?

Accordingly, this chapter describes how the developed research questions were addressed to obtain the results of the analyses. Given that this study employed a mixed research design, the results are presented in both quantitative and qualitative formats. Specifically, the mixed-methods approach involved the content analysis of 10 interview questions and descriptive statistics for data collected from 286 surveys.

The quantitative data collected in this study are presented in a tabular form, indicating mean ratings and percentages of respondents that provided such answers as *some of the time*, *most of the time*, and *always* for each survey item. A narrative is provided to explain the results of each table.

Concerning the collected qualitative data, the findings derived from this study are presented with emphasis on the narrative discussion. For this reason, a phenomenological qualitative approach was applied. The data analysis then summarizes the highlights of the section.

The chapter begins with the presentation of the demographic information of participants in this study. This section is then followed by a discussion of the key results obtained in the analysis of each research question.

Description of Samples

Student Sample

The total number of students who participated and responded to the survey was 286. The sample comprised both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at more than 90 universities across the United States (see Appendix C). The demographic information for these participants is provided in Table 1. The table indicates that approximately two-thirds of the students who took the survey were graduate students and one third was undergraduates. More than three-fourths had a GPA above 3.00. The sample included slightly more men than women, representing the general population of Saudi students in the U.S: 59% men and 41% women. Of these, 59% were married and half had children. A large majority of the students in the sample (82%) were supported financially through the Saudi Government Scholarship Program.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Student Sample

Characteristics	%	N
Degree Level		
Undergraduate	32.49%	64
Graduate	67.51%	133

(continued)

Characteristics	%	N
Cumulative GPA		
2.00 or lower	0.93%	2
2.01 - 2.50	6.02%	13
2.51 - 3.00	8.33%	18
3.01 - 3.50	21.30%	46
3.51 - 4.00	56.02%	121
Not Applicable; it is my first semester in the U.S.	7.41%	16
Gender		
Male	58.88%	126
Female	41.12%	88
Marital Status		
Single	38.89%	84
Married	59.26%	128
Divorced	1.85%	4
Children		
None	49.30%	106
One or More	50.70%	109
Main Funding Source		
Saudi Government Scholarship Program	82.40%	192
Personal/Family Funds	7.30%	17
University Scholarship or Assistantship	7.30%	17
Other	3.00%	7

Faculty and Administrators Sample

Table 2 shows the distribution of the interview participants by gender and type of appointment.

Table 2

Interview Participants by Gender and Type

Participant	Gender	Type (Faculty, Dean, or Administrator)
Participant 1	Female	Chair and faculty
Participant 2	Female	Dean
Participant 3	Male	Faculty
Participant 4	Male	Faculty
Participant 5	Male	Dean and Faculty
Participant 6	Female	Faculty
Participant 7	Male	Faculty
Participant 8	Male	Chair and Faculty
Participant 9	Male	Dean and Faculty
Participant 10	Male	Dean and Faculty

Of the 10 participants, 8 were men, 4 were deans, 2 were department chairs, and 2 were faculty with no administrative appointment. All respondents were employed at a historically black college or university (HBCU) located in the major urban area in the Southeast region of the United States.

Findings of the Quantitative Analysis

RQ1: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to cultural differences?

A total of 286 students answered questions related to the frequency of stress they experienced because of cultural differences. Both the average rating and the percentage

of respondents who selected *Never*, *Almost Never*, *Some of the Time*, *Most of the time*, or *Always* are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Differences

#	Question	Never	Almost Never (less than an hour per week)	Some of the Time (less than two hours per week)	Most of the time (three days per week)
1	Difficulties in understanding the American culture	23.08%	23.08%	39.16%	11.89%
2	Difficulties with the English language	12.59%	26.22%	41.96%	14.34%
3	Difficulties in accustoming to the American food	22.26%	21.91%	28.62%	18.37%
4	Negative experience with discrimination of Muslim students	35.69%	31.45%	20.49%	7.42%
5	Difficulties related to differences in dressing and apparel	42.14%	21.07%	22.86%	9.29%
6	Feeling unsafe in the environment where students live or go the school.	40.99%	22.26%	18.73%	12.72%
7	Difficulties related to religious differences	40.78%	24.11%	21.28%	9.22%

(continued)

#	Question	Never (five days per week)	Mean	SD	N
1	Difficulties in understanding the American culture	2.80%	2.48	1.06	286
2	Difficulties with the English language	4.90%	2.73	1.02	286
3	Difficulties in accustoming to the American food	8.83%	2.70	1.25	283
4	Negative experience with discrimination of Muslim students	4.95%	2.14	1.13	283
5	Difficulties related to differences in dressing and apparel	4.64%	2.13	1.19	280
6	Feeling unsafe in the environment where students live or go the school.	5.30%	2.19	1.24	283
7	Difficulties related to religious differences	4.61%	2.13	1.18	282

The results indicated that 54% of students experienced stress associated with difficulties in understanding the American culture at least at times; 61% experienced difficulties with the English language, and 56% experienced difficulties in accustoming to the American food. Approximately 33% experienced stress related to the negative experience with discrimination of Muslim students, while 37% experienced some level of stress associated with feeling unsafe in the environment they live or go to school or caused by differences in dressing and apparel (see Table 3).

RQ2: To what extent does stress caused by cultural differences impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

Approximately 60% of the surveyed students considered that the stress caused by cultural differences had negatively affected their academic performance. Of the students

who had this opinion, however, only 7% thought that this type of stress had influenced their performance to a great extent (see Table 4).

Table 4

Impact of Stress from Cultural Differences on Academic Performance

Answer	%	<i>N</i>
No impact	40.59%	110
To some extent	52.40%	142
To a great extent	7.01%	19
Total	100.00%	271

RQ3: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to lack of social integration?

The results revealed that 66% of students experienced stress related to difficulties in making new friends at least some of the time; 47% had a negative experience with staff/administrators interactions, and 67% had trouble with socializing with American students. Approximately 63% of students experienced some stress because of homesickness and feelings of loneliness and disconnect.

In addition, 53% of the students experienced feelings of stress due to the lack of social events for international students, 57% due to the lack of campus-sponsored social activities for international events and their families, and 67% because of the difficulty to find time to participate in social activities on campus (see Table 5).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Social Integration

#	Question	Never	Almost Never (less than an hour per week)	Some of the Time (less than two hours per week)	Most of the time (three days per week)
1	Difficulties in making new friends	18.04%	16.08%	30.98%	23.53%
2	Negative experience of interactions with the staff/administrators	21.74%	31.62%	28.85%	11.86%
3	Difficulties in socializing with American students	14.29%	19.05%	28.97%	24.21%
4	Homesickness	16.93%	19.69%	32.68%	17.72%
5	The lack of social events for international students on campus	21.91%	24.70%	26.69%	15.14%
6	Feelings of loneliness and disconnect	19.12%	18.33%	34.66%	14.34%
7	The lack of campus- sponsored social activities for international students and their families	18.40%	24.80%	29.60%	16.80%
8	Impossibility to find time to participate in social activities on campus	12.80%	20.00%	25.60%	27.60%

(continued)

		Never (five days			
#	Question	per week)	Mean	SD	N
1	Difficulties in making new friends	11.37%	2.94	1.25	255
2	Negative experience of interactions with the staff/administrators	5.93%	2.49	1.13	253
3	Difficulties in socializing with American students	13.49%	3.04	1.24	252
4	Homesickness	12.99%	2.90	1.25	254
5	The lack of social events for international students on campus	11.55%	2.70	1.28	251
6	Feelings of loneliness and disconnect	13.55%	2.85	1.27	251
7	The lack of campus-sponsored social activities for international students and their families	10.40%	2.76	1.23	250
8	Impossibility to find time to participate in social activities on campus	14.00%	3.10	1.24	250

RQ4: To what extent does stress caused by lack of social integration impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

An estimated 66% of the surveyed students held the view that the stress caused by the lack of social integration affected their academic performance. Of these students, only 12% thought that this type of stress had impacted their performance to a great extent. The majority (54%) considered that this type of stress influenced their academic performance to some extent (see Table 6).

Table 6

Impact of Stress from Lack of Social Integration on Academic Performance

Answer	%	N
No impact	34.15%	84
To some extent	54.07%	133
To a great extent	11.79%	29
Total	100.00%	246

RQ5: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to their academic environment?

According to the survey results, 68% of students experienced stress caused by a difficult curriculum at least at times; 49% were concerned that their program of study might be irrelevant to their work upon return to their home country; 50% experienced inadequate administrative/staff support from the department, and 48% claimed they received insufficient administrative/staff support from the university.

Approximately 43% of students experienced stress because of difficulties in understanding the working principles of an American university, 56% were stressed due to difficulties in building academic relationships with faculty, and 46% had trouble with understanding instructors in class (see Table 7).

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for the Academic Environment

#	Question	Never	Almost Never	Some of the	Most of the time
			(less than an hour per week)	Time (less than two hours per week)	(three days per week)
1	Difficult curriculum	15.09%	17.24%	39.22%	15.95%
2	Concerned about the idea that my program of study might be irrelevant to my work upon return to the home country	24.35%	26.96%	26.96%	12.61%
3	Inadequate administrative/staff support from the department	20.78%	29.44%	24.68%	16.02%
4	Insufficient administrative/staff support from the university	21.40%	30.57%	25.33%	14.85%
5	Difficulties in understanding how an American university works	23.14%	34.06%	20.96%	13.10%
6	Difficulties in building academic relationships with the faculty	18.42%	25.44%	25.88%	21.05%
7	Difficulties with understanding my instructors in class	19.38%	34.80%	31.28%	12.78%

(continued)

#	Question	Never (five days			
		per week)	Mean	SD	N
1	Difficult curriculum	12.50%	2.94	1.20	232
2	Concerned about the idea that my program of study might be irrelevant to my work upon return to the home country	9.13%	2.55	1.24	230
3	Inadequate administrative/staff support from the department	9.09%	2.63	1.23	231
4	Insufficient administrative/staff support from the university	7.86%	2.57	1.20	229
5	Difficulties in understanding how an American university works	8.73%	2.50	1.22	229
6	Difficulties in building academic relationships with the faculty	9.21%	2.77	1.23	228
7	Difficulties with understanding my instructors in class	1.76%	2.43	1.00	227

RQ6: To what extent does stress caused by the academic environment impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

According to the results, an estimated 66% of surveyed students considered that the stress caused by the academic environment had affected their academic performance. Of these students, only 20% thought that this type of stress had impacted their performance to a great extent (see Table 8).

Table 8

Impact of Stress from the Academic Environment on Academic Performance

Answer	%	N
No impact	34.23%	76
To some extent	45.95%	102
To a great extent	19.82%	44
Total	100.00%	222

RQ7: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress associated with an inadequate orientation?

The survey results indicated that 50% of students experienced stress associated with difficulties in accessing information about studying in the United States at least at times. Fifty-eight percent had limited training to improve their English, and 54% experienced difficulties in accessing adequate assistance with paperwork (for example, social security card and driver license). In addition, an estimated 51% experienced stress related to the inadequate assistance with housing, and 46% were stressed due to the inadequate assistance with finding schools or daycare for children (see Table 9).

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Inadequate Orientation

			Almost Never (less than an hour per week)	Some of the Time (less than two hours per week)	Most of the time (three days per week)	
#	Question	Never				
1	Difficulties in accessing information about studying in the U.S.	22.37%	27.85%	28.77%	12.79%	
2	Limited training to improve English	18.26%	23.29%	29.22%	14.61%	
3	Inadequate assistance with the paperwork (e.g. social security card or driver license)	20.74%	25.35%	25.35%	13.36%	
4	Inadequate assistance with housing	21.20%	27.65%	23.04%	13.36%	
5	Inadequate assistance with finding schools or daycare for children	33.03%	20.64%	18.35%	12.84%	
#	Question	Never (five days per week)		Mean	SD	N
1	Difficulties in accessing information about studying in the U.S.	8.22%		2.57	1.20	219
2	Limited training to improve English	14.61%		2.84	1.29	219
3	Inadequate assistance with the paperwork (e.g. social security card or driver license)	15.21%		2.77	1.33	217
4	Inadequate assistance with housing	14.75%		2.73	1.33	217
5	Inadequate assistance with finding schools or daycare for children	15.14%		2.56	1.44	218

RQ8: To what extent does stress caused by an inadequate orientation impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

According to the results, approximately 61% of the surveyed students considered that the stress caused by an inadequate orientation affected their academic performance. Out of them, only 19% thought that this type of stress impacted their academic performance to a great extent (see Table 10).

Table 10

Impact of Stress from Inadequate Orientation on Academic Performance

Answer	%	<i>N</i>
No impact	38.86%	82
To some extent	42.18%	89
To a great extent	18.96%	40
Total	100.00%	211

Findings of the Qualitative Analysis

The last two research questions were asked in interviews with the faculty members and deans. Therefore, answers derived from the transcription are analyzed in this study. A total of 13 questions were prepared for the interviews.

RQ9: What are the challenges that Saudi students experience on campus as perceived by faculty and administrators?

According to the responses provided by members of the faculty and deans who were interviewed, the key challenges that Saudi students experienced on campus included the following issues.

The English Language Barrier: Most of the interviewed members of faculty acknowledged that the English language barrier was a serious challenge that Saudi students faced. This challenge was considerable enough to highly impact their academic performance, thus resulting in low grades for the students.

Adjustment to the American Culture: Because of the difference between the Saudi and U.S. cultures, Saudi students experienced challenges with adjusting to the host culture. As a result, various strategies were undertaken by the schools, where the participants in the research studied, to assist them to assimilate into American life.

The Lack of Sensitivity to the Religious Needs of Saudi Students: Most Saudi students practice Islam. Therefore, given the sensitive position of this religion in the United States, it was necessary for schools to find ways of demonstrating their awareness, understanding, and readiness to accommodate the religious needs of these students.

Issues of Discrimination: Once again, due to their foreign origin and association with Islam, Saudi students would inevitably be exposed to various situations of discrimination. The participants in the study described some of the key ways that their schools used in dealing with this challenge. These measures were essential in assisting these students to interact well with fellow students and the staff.

Difficulties in Following Instructors in Class: Some students reported certain difficulties in following instructors in class. Some participants explained these difficulties with the language barrier. They were not able to follow instructors because they could not understand them.

RQ10: How can Saudi students' educational experiences be improved from the perspective of faculty and administrators?

According to the responses of the faculty members and deans, the educational experience of Saudi students can be improved by assuming the following measures.

The Creation of the Better Interaction between the Staff/Administrators and Students: The creation of the better interaction between the staff/administrators and students required ensuring that there were no strained relations between them. Most participants described this interaction as a good prerequisite of the enhanced academic performance of students.

Organization of Social Events for Saudi Students and Their Families:

Organization of social events for Saudi students and their families further served for the improvement of their educational experience since such events served to improve the social orientation of these students. With them, they were able to share their home culture and gain a better understanding of the culture of others.

Efforts Either in or Outside the Class for the Creation of Opportunities for Saudi Students to Interact with American Students: According to the responses provided by the members of the faculty team that took part in the study, efforts either in or outside the class were instrumental in creating the necessary opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American counterparts. This kind of interaction was crucial in improving the educational experience of these students. These measures are effective since they improve the interaction and relieve tension, thus allowing the two groups of students to learn together effectively.

Improving the Relevance of Programs and Courses for Saudi Students Upon

Return to Their Country: Another key observation reported by the interviewed members of the faculty was the need to improve the relevance of programs and courses that Saudi students were learning to help them succeed upon their return to the home country. Most participants asserted that they managed to achieve this aim by using examples and referring to the home country of students. Furthermore, comparing the experience of the United States and their home country was also useful in providing some sense of relevance to what the students were learning. In this way, it was useful in improving the educational experience of these students.

Provision of Adequate Administrative Support to Saudi Students: In the view of a number of members of the faculty that were interviewed in the study, students received adequate administrative support. This kind of support was equally significant when it came to ensuring that the educational experience of students was improved. Some members felt that there was a need to enhance this administrative support further for improving the educational experience of participants.

The Quality Mentorship Relations with Faculty: According to the responses provided by members of the faculty, the quality mentorship relations with Saudi students also proved essential in improving their educational experience. Under this mentorship, students could approach members of the faculty for guidance on their studies, including any problems that they faced.

An Effective Orientation Program for New Saudi Students: The educational experience of students was also improved by the application of an effective orientation

program for new Saudi students. For this reason, students were invited to the university a week before the beginning of the semester. In such a manner, students could familiarize themselves with the university and new culture, as well as make friends. This way, they were able to have a much better educational experience.

According to the questions and data that were collected for this study, the following key themes were identified: cultural differences, social integration, satisfaction with the academic environment, and orientation.

Cultural Differences

The questions that captured the theme of cultural difference with respect to Saudi students experiencing a variety of stressors while studying at American universities include the following issues. In particular, the questions investigated the topic by looking into the potential English language barriers that the students experience in both written assignments and discussions. Cultural differences were also considered in the question that investigated the role of the school with respect to such issues as the religious needs, adjustment to the American culture, and potential discrimination of students.

1. **Have you or your faculty noticed any Saudi students with the English language barrier in written assignments and/or in-class discussions?**

Please explain.

The interviewed participants admitted that Saudi students experienced English language barrier in written assignments, as well as in discussions during class. For instance, Participant 1 admitted the following: “Yes, not all submitted assignments were of sufficient quality in terms of language. As a rule, a few students would struggle with

communicating in English, thus being reluctant to engage in class discussions” (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

According to this participant, Saudi students faced the English language barrier when they had to work with written assignments as evidenced by the lack of proficiency in their works, as well as by how they struggled with contributing their opinions during the face-to-face communication.

Participant 2 also shared a similar observation concerning this English language barrier and asserted,

I have noticed that oftentimes, students themselves seem a little apprehensive about asking questions or responding to a question because they are concerned about whether they will be understood or not, and whether their English would be good enough to allow others to understand what they are talking about. For example, in my class, I had one Saudi student. According to me, she was very clever but did not speak a lot and was not willing to communicate. What could I do? I started to engage her in the discussion by asking her to share with the class what this or that issue looked like in her country or how it influenced her country. With time, she became much more active and I believe, she became much freer and ready to speak. I guess that this experience will help me cope with similar issues with Saudi students in the future and improve my work with international students, in general. (Personal communication, October 16, 2018)

According to the mentioned response, Saudi students experienced the English language barrier as proved by their attitude towards asking questions or responding to

them. This barrier would make these students worry about the possibility of being understood due to their English language skills. This participant emphasized the need of engaging students by relating and drawing connections between what they were learning and the realities of their home country.

The problem of the English language barrier in written assignments or in-class discussions is also acknowledged by Participant 6, who provided the following response:

Yeah, the language barrier is a huge problem. Depending on the class, I ask students to prepare a number of written assignments, as well as presentations. Even if I notice that some students are reluctant to do the presentations, I still ask them to do this assignment. I believe it is crucial since, in American society, they will use this experience. For example, when they go to the workplace, they will be asked or will ask new employees to do a presentation. Therefore, we have to focus on developing strong communication skills and being confident in speaking in front of a group. Usually, most Saudi students experience this problem, as well.
(Personal communication, October 22, 2018)

On the other hand, Participant 3 did not think that Saudi students had any English language barrier in their written assignments and discussion. In his response, the participant explained the following idea:

We discuss a lot of questions, and the quality of their discussions, both written and oral, is good, overall. I've had Saudi students every semester for the last three years, and have some now. So, in general, their oral communication is good.
(Personal communication, October 17, 2018)

Therefore, unlike the other two participants, Participant 3 asserted that Saudi students were proficient in English both in their assignments and in their oral communication.

Participant 7 supported the same idea; he noted that he did not notice any considerable challenges with the English language barrier in Saudi students, whom he taught. He explained,

Actually, I had one Saudi student in my introductory biochemistry for undergraduate students and I did not experience any barriers in terms of any language difficulties in my class. My impression is that the writing skills and the communication of Saudi students is right above average. (Personal communication, October 23, 2018)

However, Participant 5 held mixed feelings concerning the issue of the English language barrier. He asserted that he met both students who had no language barrier and those who experienced such difficulties. He further explained,

So, I had one, two, three, four, five Saudi students in my graduate class in Biology. One of the Saudi students is doing his dissertation in my lab. His English is outstanding, so from what I know, he faces no barrier. In fact, he is a good speaker, very well-read, and he speaks English very well. Therefore, it is just because he has to be courageous to engage in a discussion, so everybody has. And, with this student, I've never had any language issues. However, I do see that other five students in my Biology class experience a significant barrier in the

English language. It is a problem they have to overcome. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

The extent of the English language barrier that the Saudi students experienced was further illustrated by the need for them to translate into Arabic what was taught in class, understanding it, and then translating their response back into English. This issue presented a major difficulty for these students. Participant 5 explained this problem.

It was very difficult for them to understand and to write. And, at many points, they would write down what I was telling them and they would translate it into Arabic to catch what is going on, right? And then, they would shape their thoughts in Arabic, and then translate them into English to engage in the class discussion. So, I think that the English language barrier is really huge; it's very difficult to struggle through, especially when you are a graduate student and the problem endangers your success. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Participant 9 (personal communication, October 24, 2019) further acknowledged the existence of Saudi students with the English language barrier by simply responding "A few," without a detailed explanation.

A. If yes, how do these language barriers influence students' academic performance?

Most participants in the study agreed that language barriers affected the students' academic performance. For instance, Participant 1 noted, "In some cases, the grade was lower than anticipated because of the language barrier in written and oral assignments" (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Participant 3 did not agree with the idea that the language barrier affected the students' academic performance. He asserted, "So, I have never noticed any decrease in the grade because of such a barrier" (personal communication, October 17, 2018). He further explained that his viewpoint was clear since students were able to prepare their assignments in Arabic and then translate them into English. Even though such manipulations would take them longer, the quality of their work will not suffer. According to this response, one can assume that the excellent performance of these participants can be attributed to their willingness to study that does not depend on the Arabic, English, or any other language.

In his turn, Participant 5 asserted that the English language barrier affected the academic performance of students; he answered *yes* for this question and developed his idea in the following explanation statement:

Yes, the barrier can affect one or two of Saudi students; however, most students will work hard to see their problem and do their best to overcome it. Those students that are unwilling to work hard and learn will risk their academic success because of this barrier. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Therefore, this participant asserted that if this barrier is not adequately addressed, it can negatively affect the overall success of most students.

Participant 6 also confirmed how the language barrier negatively affects the academic performance of Saudi student by noting that students are not able to perform effectively when it comes to writing short answers in tests:

Yeah, it does, it does impact students' performance. And I can see this in my supply chain class that I teach. I give multiple-choice tests and I ask questions that require short answers. I don't know whether it is true or not, but I have heard that Saudi students use some manuals, thus they know the right answers for multiple-choice questions. Usually, they get 100% there. However, when I ask for short answers, they get zero. (Personal communication, October 22, 2018)

Likewise, Participant 7 also agreed that the language barrier has the potential to impact the academic performance of students. Specifically, he noted, "Definitely, yes. It is a problem for the majority of international students. On the other hand, any communication, both written and spoken, is really key to their success. Therefore, the better the language, the better the achievement. For sure" (personal communication, October 23, 2018).

According to this participant, the performance of Saudi students is affected by the language barrier and that is a challenge for many international students, whose written and spoken communication skills tend to be limited. In its turn, the lack of such proficiency affects the extent to which international students they are able to achieve success.

In addition, Participant 8 also confirmed this negative impact of the English language barrier on the academic performance of students, especially those from Saudi Arabia: "The primary challenge is the language barrier, and I noticed that many Saudi students score much lower on language tests than other schools demand. Maybe it is one of the reasons that they come here" (personal communication, October 23, 2018).

In the preceding statement, language tests refer to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) that students take to assess the level of their English language proficiency. The respondent asserts that students' low test scores make them enter the school examined through the structured interviews.

Participant 9 also believed that the English language barrier impacts the academic performance of Saudi students. He gave the following response" "It does affect students because it impairs their comprehension to a great extent" (personal communication, October 24, 2019).

The opinion shared by these participants is rather significant because if students are not able to comprehend what they are being taught or asked to do, they will not be able to succeed. Therefore, the lack of understanding caused by the language barrier will have a detrimental impact on their academic performance.

However, Participant 4 considered that the English language barrier does not affect the academic performance of Saudi students, at least in some classes. The participant stated, "I don't think it affects the mathematics classes" (personal communication, October 18, 2018).

According to the previous discussion, it is apparent that the large majority of participants shared the view that language barrier of the students had the potential to impact the academic performance of Saudi students severely.

B. How can the university better support Saudi students to improve their English language proficiency?

According to the responses provided by the interview participants, the university has the responsibility of providing support to Saudi students to improve their English language proficiency. Participant 1 asserted that this support can be provided through the Graduate Writing Program.

The university does provide a Graduate Writing Program that, when used appropriately, can help students improve their written communication.

Additionally, Saudi students were allowed to use translation apps during examinations, which should have reduced some degree of stress. Perhaps more mentoring programs would have been helpful. (Personal communication, October 9, 2018)

Participant 4 suggested that universities encourage their Saudi students to communicate and interact with local students instead of socializing all the time with Saudi fellows. In such a manner, students will improve their English language proficiency. The participant asserted,

One thing is that I see Saudi students always by themselves, talking to each other in Arabic. You cannot improve your English if you do not use it; if you hang out only with your people, you cannot assimilate. They have to mix with other students and they have to share their unique culture and explain who Saudis are and what Saudi Arabia is. They have to take the initiative because local students may not care; they may think that they don't want to mix with foreigners, but all students have to cooperate to achieve the best results. (Personal communication, October 18, 2018)

According to Participant 5, the university could offer English proficiency courses to foreign students while they are still in their home countries in order to help them improve their English language proficiency. Accordingly, once students travel to the United States for their studies, there is not enough time to teach them the language. The participant explained,

I think that Saudi schools should offer an English proficiency course or courses in Saudi Arabia and India to students that are coming here. Otherwise, when they are picked up and brought to the U.S., they have a very small window to learn English, upon which their success depends. So, any student that wants to come to the country or apply for SACM should demonstrate the ability to read, write, and understand the English language. Obviously, they should acquire this proficiency back home in Saudi Arabia, and not here. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Participant 6 suggested the use of training labs that will focus on language as a useful means of improving the language proficiency of Saudi students. Particularly, this participant explained,

Well, there are training labs for improving technical skills. So, I believe training labs for improving the language proficiency will be useful, as well. I know some students have such training for foreign languages. In most cases, such training has good results. I'm certain that something can be done to help these students improve their proficiency in the English language. (Personal communication, October 22, 2018)

At the same time, this participant pointed out that arranging such language labs was a challenging task. For this reason, such a task will be a significant burden for the university; instead, such a task should be given to the Saudi government.

2. What does your school do to help Saudi students adjust to the American culture?

The participants listed some of the key practices carried out by their schools that aimed at assisting Saudi students to adjust to the American culture. Participant 1 described this assistance in the following manner:

Our program allowed Saudi students to share their view of cultural differences.

International students would bring food to classes and share with American classmates. Our university activities were opened to all students irrespective of their origin. On some occasions, Saudi students volunteered to participate in conferences, shared dinners, and group assignments in the class with the view to comprehending cultural differences. (Personal communication, October 9, 2018)

According to this participant, his school helped Saudi students adjust to the American culture by developing a program that encourages these students to share stories regarding cultural differences. A good example of these efforts is allowing students to share their food in class with their American fellow students. In addition, exposing students to different school cultures at the university proved to be helpful, as well. Other key ways included the participation of Saudi students in conferences, shared dinners, and group assignments with the view to improving the cooperation of representatives of different nations.

Participant 5 talked about the establishment of a good international studies office as one of the key strategies employed by their school to assist Saudi students in adjusting to the American culture. He explained,

So, we have a good international office, and I hope it does a good job; however, I have never co-worked with it. I think we need to be open to accepting any foreign culture. Although Americans would always talk about this openness, I don't know how far we have embraced this idea. I think we need to show international students, with their different strengths and weaknesses, that we are ready and willing to accept and welcome them. We should actively cooperate with them to provide them with what they want and need. It is especially true in the case of Saudi students. I think the foreign studies office does its best to help such students assimilate by exposing them to the American culture. However, I also believe that there is always room for improvement, and I think we as a community should be more inclusive, as well. The University should engage more. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

In the provided response, the participant acknowledges the efforts of the school aimed at assisting these students to adjust to the American culture. However, the participant admitted that having an international studies office is not enough. Instead, he encouraged doing much more to assist these students; he specifically recommended to adopt a more inclusive strategy that would go beyond treating international students as merely foreigners.

3. What does your school do to demonstrate sensitivity toward and readiness to accommodate the religious needs of Saudi students?

Participant 1 demonstrated the school's sensitivity toward and readiness to accommodate the religious needs of Saudi students; in his response, he asserted, "The University Provost declared religious holidays for Saudi students (No class attendance). Professors were sent email messages outlining dates and the no class attendance policy" (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Participant 5 also revealed what their school has done to demonstrate sensitivity toward and readiness to accommodate the religious needs of Saudi students. According to this participant, the school does the following:

Sensitivity toward and readiness to accommodate the religious needs? I think we have done it! Yes, we did! We are very sensitive to the religious needs of all students, including those from Saudi Arabia. We give holidays whenever there is a need, and we let them attend masses on Friday afternoons. So we do accommodate, and I think we are culturally very sensitive to their needs. In general, the whole administration seems to be very responsive. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

According to the above response, the school does a lot to demonstrate its sensitivity toward the religious needs of all students. The administration provides them with day-offs to celebrate their religious holidays. This approach is especially significant since Muslim religious holidays are moveable and depend on the moon and other factors.

Furthermore, giving the students an opportunity to attend Friday prayers is a great move forward towards meeting their religious needs since it is the holy day for all Muslims.

4. What does your school do to address potential issues of discrimination against Saudi students?

According to Participant 1, “The university has point persons that have the duty to monitor and support Saudi students. Our community seldom reports issues with discrimination of international students; within my knowledge, it has never happened” (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Similarly, Participant 5 pointed out that there are no large-scale cases of discrimination; for this reason, the school has little to do to address this issue. This participant also added that those few existing cases of discrimination targeted not only Saudi students but also their American counterparts. For this reason, no actual plans were developed to fight the specific discrimination of Saudi students alone. The participant explained,

I don’t know much about it, but I don’t see discrimination in this environment.

Probably, isolated incidents occur from time to time, but American students have faced such issues, as well. So, we cannot solve large-scale discrimination since we cannot see one. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Social Integration

The larger theme of social integration was uncovered in answers to interview questions 5, 6, and 7. In line with the collected data, such elements as the interaction between the staff/administrators and students, social events for Saudi students and their

families, and the interaction of these students with American students define the social integration of Saudi students.

5. Describe the interaction between the staff/administrators and students.

Have you noticed any strained relations? If yes, how do these strained relationships influence the students' academic performance?

The response provided by Participant 1 to this question indicated that the interaction between the staff/administrators and students is amicable and there are no strained relationships between the two. He asserted, "In the Department of Educational Leadership, no strained relationships were observed. Saudi students most often were greeted with an Open Policy and the staff members would do their best to support these students and meet their needs" (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Participant 4 also believes that the interaction between the staff/administrators and Saudi students is good. He explained,

I cannot see any negative reaction from other students to Saudi fellows. Even if there are about five students in my class, and only one is Saudi, I don't see any problem of negative attitudes of others toward him; Saudi students are friendly with other students, as well. So, everything seems to be ok. However, bad is that they don't mix. They're just in their own circles. (Personal communication, October 18, 2018)

According to this participant, the interaction is generally good and amicable with all students having an excellent attitude to each other. However, this participant

emphasized the tendency of Saudi students to self-isolate as opposed to mixing with others.

Furthermore, Participant 5 also shared the view that the interaction between the staff/administrators and Saudi students is good. He emphasized,

I can only speak about my interaction because I am both a faculty member and an administrator. I have always dealt with all students with great respect. I think I have a very strong level of trust with all Saudi students. They would come and talk to me and we discuss their problems. Also, I have represented Saudi students in various University forums and advocated their needs. So, I can describe our interaction as pleasant and fruitful. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Nonetheless, according to Participant 5, he could not be objective since he based his answer on his personal experience only which meant that it is not possible to generalize this information. Therefore, his good interaction with Saudi students may not be true in the case of other staff members and administrators.

Participant 6 also indicated that there are no strained relations between the staff/administrators and students. He asserted, “I don’t see any strained relations at all” (personal communication, October 22, 2018).

The good relationship between Saudi students and the staff members/administrators was further confirmed by Participant 7 who also noted that there are no strained relations: “Well, that is a good question, but I have never had such an experience” (personal communication, October 23, 2018).

6. Describe any social events your school organizes for Saudi students and their families. How can these activities be improved?

Participant 1 named Cultural Awareness Day as a key social event in the school that is organized for Saudi students and their families. The participant noted, “One such event was the Cultural Awareness Day. The students dressed in their cultural attire and brought food to share with the class. This event might be held in various schools” (personal communication, October 9, 2018). The participant noted this social event could be expanded to other schools. According to Participant 5, “There’s a Saudi day in our school, and they celebrate. It’s a bright food celebration. I think it’s a rich and valuable cultural experience that we all love” (personal communication, October 19, 2018).

This is an excellent example of a social event for Saudi students that demonstrates the school’s commitment towards the social integration of international students into the local community. In such a manner, these students are allowed to share their culture with fellow non-Saudi students through the food celebration. On the other hand, Participant 6 identified the international day as a social event that the school organized for Saudi students and their families. This participant stated, “They have many social events like international days. The last year, I think they were giving out brochures to help us understand their Saudi world. It was rather interesting” (personal communication, October 22, 2018).

According to the response of this participant, the school does a lot to hold social events for Saudi students. The international day is one of these events; it helps the local community (including the staff and fellow students) recognize the culture of Saudi

students and gain insight into the culture of other nations. At the same time, such events are significant in ensuring that others, especially fellow American students, are able to understand Saudi students better.

7. Describe any efforts either in or outside the class aimed at creating opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American fellows. How can these efforts be improved?

Participant 1 identified such efforts as follows:

In class, students were divided into groups or pairs to work together with American students. The groups or pairs were supposed to meet off campus to prepare their assignments. I noticed that Saudi students would rarely associate with other nations, unless in class or this work on assignments. (Personal communication, October 9, 2018)

According to this participant, the school has managed to create opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American students both in and outside the class. The students mix with their American classmates to discuss assignments they are given during class and off campus for the further preparation of these tasks. This strategy was instrumental in enhancing the degree of interaction among these students given that Saudi students tended to interact primarily with their co-nationals. However, making them work together with Americans boosted not only their interaction but also their general readiness to communicate with others classmates.

Participant 4 talked about encouraging students in his classroom by making them mix with others. He asserted,

Well, I was a chair of the Department of Mathematics, and I had graduate and undergraduate Math students. Now, I also have a lot of students in my class because I teach Business Calculus. Among business students, there are a lot of Saudi students here. I ask them to mix, to communicate, to interact but I have not seen their willingness and readiness to follow my advice. (Personal communication, October 18, 2018)

To improve interaction, Participant 4 encouraged these students practicing and experiencing the language as this will serve as the best way of improving their proficiency in the language. The participant explained, “That is the best way both to teach and learn new things. I am talking about not only class things. They have to learn and become ambassadors of Saudi Arabia here” (personal communication, October 18, 2018).

As such, this participant believed that practicing and experiencing the English language will be essential in assisting these students to make changes locally. In addition, this will also provide them with skills to learn more. Consequently, they will become ambassadors of their nation in the United States.

Another example of such efforts towards creating opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American fellows is provided by Participant 5:

I think in the class, there is an interaction, but I know little about such interactions outside the school. I think that Saudi students have some cultural events and invite American students to join. I think they do but I don’t know for sure. But I have seen that in classes, in my labs, they interact very well. Overall, I think such

interactions are very supportive and positive. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Accordingly, this participant recognized the interaction between Saudi students and their American counterparts in the classroom. However, he admitted that he has limited knowledge about such interactions outside the school. Nonetheless, the participant indicated that he remembers several cultural events held for or by Saudi students, to which American students were invited.

Furthermore, Participant 6 also described additional efforts that can be made towards making these two groups interact with each other:

If I have a chance to use the cultural interaction, I do! For example, if I know that there is something that Saudi students can explain to Americans, I will ask a question. What happens in Saudi Arabia? What do you, guys, do with it? So, we can understand a little better of what is going on in a completely different part of the globe because students really don't know but want to know. As a rule, Americans are interested in American life only. I'm a foreigner, and I know what I'm talking about. Americans don't really care about anything else but the U.S., but if they are going to work in the globalized world, they have to understand or at least strive to understand other cultures. (Personal communication, October 22, 2018)

Participant 8 described some ways of creating opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American fellows. However, the participant described these efforts from a personal standpoint as opposed to explaining activities conducted by the school:

Yeah, I divided my class into two groups, so if we have a group project, each student has to prepare it in own group only. This way, I make people that do not know each other and most likely won't ever communicate to interact for the common good. (Personal communication, October 23, 2018)

In this class environment, the respondent creates an opportunity for Saudi students to interact with American fellows by making them prepare group projects together. Therefore, this participant strives to ensure that students learn how to cooperate with different people to solve a common problem. This approach is instrumental in helping Saudi students open up and mix with their fellow American students.

Participant 9 used a similar approach as the one described by Participant 8 by getting Saudi students to work together with their American fellows in the classroom in group projects. He explained his strategy in the following manner: "I know it is a common practice, and I use it as well. I believe that making students work in a mixed group is beneficial and brings good fruit" (personal communication, October 24, 2018).

Satisfaction with the Academic Environment

Satisfaction with the academic environment was investigated through several interview questions. First, the researcher investigated the degree of relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students to their country. Furthermore, the researcher looked into the potential difficulties that these students faced with following instructors in class. In addition, the role of administrative support in enhancing the academic environment of these students was examined. Lastly, the researcher also determined the importance of mentorship relations with faculty in improving this academic environment.

8. Describe any changes you made to your program or courses to improve the relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students upon their return to home country.

The participants explained a few changes that they made to their program/courses in an effort to improve the relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students upon their return to home country. In this regard, Participant 1 explained,

Students were given assignments that required them to detail how they would use this or that theory or strategy upon returning to their home country. The Comprehensive examination is an excellent task that asks students to select a topic and explain how they are going to implement educational programs once they return home. The Comprehensive examination was restructured to meet the needs of our Saudi students. (Personal communication, October 9, 2018)

However, Participant 5 admitted that he introduced no changes to enhance the relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students upon their return to home country.

Specifically, this participant asserted,

So, I think there are a lot of projects that we have developed to address Saudi students. I think Computer Science does something; they are working on some cyber security projects which are supposed to work for Saudi students. I think that if we want to make their experience valuable, we should simply ask what they need or rely on their choice. Everything is obvious; we don't know what kind of educational experience they actually require. We assume that whatever we teach here will be relevant, but I'm pretty sure that if there is a dialogue of what kind of

experience they want, we can develop and adjust the curriculum. We are always open and flexible. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

According to the above explanation shared by this participant, there are few projects that have been developed with the purpose of ensuring that what Saudi students learn will be relevant to them and their country. The participant provided an example of the Computer Science class and the program developed to make these students learn about cyber security while indicating its relevance to their home environment. However, it is essential to mention that the participant does not indicate why it is relevant to these students. The participant thus admitted the need to do more towards identifying what these students want to learn and what is relevant to their environment.

In an attempt to make changes in their program and courses with the intent of improving the relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students upon their return to home country, Participant 6 noted,

We try to ask questions sometimes, but we're dealing with certain topics, ethics, culture, how this or that happens in their country. I ask them to share, compare, and contrast. How do you treat low-income families? Is there any discrimination based on sex? If they know the difference, they are more likely to manage it and get the best experience relevant to their life at home. (Personal communication, October 22, 2018)

According to this participant, he tries to make the programs relevant to Saudi students and relate what they are learning with the realities of their home country. For instance, the participant invited Saudi students to think about ethical and cultural aspects of their

lives and how things are treated in their country. In this case, what they learn is relevant to their country; for this reason, they will be able to apply the earned knowledge in the future.

Participant 8 used an approach similar to the one described by Participant 6. He emphasized the significance of drawing parallels of the material learned with the students' home country. This participant asserted the following:

I would make sure that we use examples from the students' native country and draw parallels with what is going on here, in the U.S. Also, I read articles by Saudi scholars, and know what to do to make these parallels effective. (Personal communication, October 23, 2018)

9. Have you or other faculty members noticed that Saudi students have difficulties with following instructors in class?

In their responses, participants indicated that they have noticed that Saudi students experienced some difficulties in following instructors in class. For instance, Participant 5 acknowledged the existence of such difficulties experienced by Saudi students in his response:

Yes, I have noticed something like that. I think it goes back to my previous discussion with you that the English language is a big barrier. I don't think culture is a barrier. I think the language itself is the only barrier. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

According to this participant, these difficulties are caused by the English language barrier. Accordingly, if students are not able to understand English, they are not able to understand instructors that teach in this language.

Participant 8, as a member of the faculty, also admitted that Saudi students tend to have difficulties with following instructors in class. The participant discussed how he addressed this difficulty:

Oh, yeah. So, to help students that face the language barrier because of, say, the instructors' dialect or whatever reason, I upload every lecture online and I use a lot of audiovisual stuff. So, even if they cannot follow the lecturer, they can read the material on the web. (Personal communication, October 23, 2018)

As evidenced by his response, the participant has noticed that Saudi students have difficulties with following instructions. The participant attributed these difficulties to dialects, which cause the language barrier. To address the issue, he provided the lectures online. He also uses audiovisual learning means to help his students follow his ideas better. Consequently, these students can follow what they are being taught in class.

However, a few participants reported that Saudi students did not have difficulties following instructors in class. For instance, Participant 4 indicated that he has not had students who found it difficult to follow instructors. He always made sure students managed to follow him in class. He stated,

No, I don't see any problem because I make sure that students understand instructions. I don't know how it happens in other classes, but because I am from East Africa, namely Ethiopia, I understand what difficulties foreigners can face.

So I always ask them, ‘Okay, did you get the assignment? Did you get it correct?’

(Personal communication, October 18, 2018)

Participant 6 admitted that he is not sure whether Saudi students have difficulties with following instructors in class. He explained, “I’m not certain because these students are very friendly and smiling. Unless you ask a direct question, you can’t be sure whether they have understood you or not” (personal communication, October 22, 2018).

According to this participant, usually, lecturers are not able to determine whether Saudi students are able to follow them or not because these students do not ask to repeat or explain. They are not willing to show their weakness. As such, students do not want to admit those difficulties and try to conceal any nonverbal cues. Instead, they would just smile and shake their heads in a manner to prove that they do understand, while in fact, they do not.

10. According to you, is administrative support provided to Saudi students adequate? If not, what is to be improved?

Participant 1 asserted that the administrative support provided to Saudi students is adequate: “Yes, administrative support provided to students is adequate. However, sometimes, Saudi students are too shy or perhaps reluctant to meet with the appointed member of the faculty. If they do, they get a chance to build a good friendship” (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

However, Participant 5 did not think that the administrative support that is provided to Saudi students is adequate; therefore, he suggested some improvements. He asserted,

I think we can do better. Administrative support can be much better. We may fail to understand their cultural needs, their expectations, or how the entire process works. For example, we are not aware of the rules and regulations that Saudi students come here and the SACM, so better communication of those rules and regulations with the faculty and administrators would help us direct students and their efforts effectively. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Therefore, according to Participant 5, improving administrative support provided to students should entail gaining a better understanding of their cultural needs and other requirements they may have. Better communication of the rules and regulations with faculty and administrators could be useful in ensuring that students remain on the right track.

Participant 6 was not certain about whether students receive any help from the administration or not. He responded, “Sorry, I don’t know. I really don’t know what they get outside the classroom” (personal communication, October 22, 2018). Such a response from a faculty member was rather surprising. It may mean that Saudi students do not receive any assistance and support from the administration. If such support was provided and was effective, a lot of people on campus, especially members of the faculty, would know about it.

In addition, Participant 7 did not believe that administrative support provided to Saudi students is adequate:

Yeah, it’s a good question, and then yes, I heard that some have difficulties with the international studies office. To be honest with you, every international student

has difficulties with this office. Of course, sometimes, we all can't understand another side. I would actually suggest that they need to follow the rules and guidelines imposed by international studies office because they execute the guidelines imposed by the federal government. So, they should ensure that everything they put into their system is accurate and true. But, other than that, I did not hear any complaints. In my office, I don't have any problems of the kind. I try to do my best to ease the situation of international students. When they come to me, I try to help regardless of their origin. (Personal communication, October 23, 2018)

This participant indicated that administrative support was provided to Saudi students through the establishment of an international studies office. Saudi and other international students can approach this office for any help and support. However, the respondent admitted that this office makes inadequate efforts and students experience difficulties when attempting to seek help from it. The participant added that receiving administrative support should ensure that students have enough knowledge of the rules and guidelines regarding receiving support as detected by the internal office. Furthermore, the participant admitted that he has not experienced any difficulties in his office and that he is ready to provide international students with support.

11. Do you think Saudi students are provided with adequate opportunities to build quality mentorship relations with the faculty at your school? If not, what is to be improved?

According to the response provided by Participant 1, Saudi students are given adequate opportunities to build quality mentorship relations with the faculty at the school. Specifically, the participant explained,

Yes, students who were open to changes experienced fewer challenges in developing lasting relationships with their professors. On a personal note, my Saudi students can email me, send pictures, and just check-in once they return home. I met their families during graduation celebrations and they all knew who I was. (Personal communication, October 9, 2018)

Participant 4 also thought that Saudi students are given adequate opportunities to build quality mentorship relations with the faculty with the help of academic advisors:

A Saudi or anybody who understands the matter, speaks the Arabic language, and wants to help others can become a good academic advisor. A good advisor will seek to build good relationships with students and become their friends. So, this type of counselor may motivate Saudi students and help them adjust to the host environment. (Personal communication, October 18, 2018)

According to this participant's explanation, the school provides Saudi students with academic advisors, whose role is to motivate students in the course of mentoring them. Furthermore, these academic advisors also help students remain focused. This assistance is significant in order to ensure that Saudi students remember the key reason for their studies in the United States.

The response provided by Participant 5 also indicated that Saudi students are provided with adequate opportunities to build quality mentorship relations with the faculty members. The participant explained,

I think we do have adequate opportunities, but I don't know how many students want to engage in such relationships. In my lab, we have very good relationships. So, mentorship there is effective, and I don't think that any discrimination in these relationships is possible. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Therefore, Participant 5 admitted that the issue that arises is not associated with the availability of such opportunities. Instead, the issue was connected with these students' ability to use these opportunities and be mentored. This participant also emphasized that there is no place for discrimination in mentoring these students.

Participant 9 further confirmed the existence of such opportunities for mentoring Saudi students: "The opportunities are available, and I think both the students and the faculty have to do a better job to achieve desired results" (personal communication, October 24, 2018). This participant found that the university provides international students with opportunities to build quality mentorship relations with the faculty. The only issue is that students and the faculty are not doing a good job when utilizing these opportunities, which indicates the need to make some changes and improvements.

According to the response provided by Participant 6, there is no direct effort established towards building mentorship relations with the faculty. He explained this situation as follows:

I don't think there is any direct effort aimed at providing quality mentorship. Of course, one should understand that mentorship is a two-way process. If someone comes and says, 'I need some help' or 'Can you be my mentor,' every professor will be willing to help. Even though we might be too busy to notice students that require help, we are always ready to help. (Personal communication, October 22, 2018)

According to this respondent, building a mentorship relationship depends highly on students since members of the faculty might be too busy to offer own help first. For this reason, the students should recognize their weaknesses and approach the right member of the faculty for appropriate assistance.

Orientation

Two interview questions were instrumental in assessing orientation according to the data collected from the respondents. In particular, these questions were instrumental in demonstrating the efforts of the schools aimed at improving the orientation of new Saudi students and what the schools do to assist these students in getting settled before the beginning of the academic year. Furthermore, they also revealed the key improvements that can be made by schools with the aim of providing Saudi students with the most effective orientation and support once they arrive in the United States for their studies.

- 12. Is there an orientation program for new Saudi students at your school? If yes, please describe any assistance with settling students get before the beginning of the academic year.**

Participant 1 responded that the school had an orientation program. In his response, he asserted, “Orientation sessions are provided at several levels for all Saudi students. The office of International Studies offers good orientation programs; also, various academic departments provide additional support” (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Participant 5 also noted that his school has an orientation program for new Saudi students:

There is an orientation program. However, I believe that we can improve our approach. We can give these students their F-1 visa a bit earlier, so that they can come here a couple of weeks ahead of the beginning of their classes to get oriented. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

Therefore, this participant believed that the timely orientation will significantly help Saudi students learn and understand their new learning environment. They emphasized the need to provide students with visa and other required documents as early as possible so that they will have a better opportunity for a successful orientation. If they arrive in the country before the beginning of the academic year, they will have more time to understand what is expected of them.

Participant 7 admitted the lack of knowledge of the specifics of how schools can provide support and help new students once they arrive in the United States. He asserted, “I am not sure about that question. I don’t think I will be able to answer it accurately. Sorry” (personal communication, October 23, 2018). However, in attempting to address this question, the participant further spoke about schools launching orientation programs

as a part of their efforts to assist these students. In this regard, the participant asserted that a rather standard strategy is used for accommodating the orientation needs of all new students, including international ones, especially those from Saudi Arabia.

According to Participant 8, the school does have an orientation program for Saudi students. New students can get help with settling before the beginning of the academic year. The participant confirmed,

I think they do a fairly adequate job. I've noticed one interesting thing. Last year, I had a student who came two weeks before the semester. His visa allowed him and he used the opportunity to arrive earlier and have enough time for settling things regardless of the orientation. We have to make sure that Saudi students are here in ample time before classes begin so that they can assimilate into the local life. So, maybe we can offer an earlier student orientation outside the U.S. back in their home country. It must be a convenient time for all stakeholders, including the staff, the administration, the family, and of course students. Some schools would ask their international students to come a week before the beginning of classes for effective orientation. This way, every international student can spend this week either for developing social relationships or for engaging in different cultural activities. (Personal communication, October 23, 2018)

According to the explanation provided by Participant 8, effective orientation should entail ensuring that Saudi students are able to get to school in ample time despite any possible issues, including the visa-related ones. This early arrival is significant in ensuring that Saudi students are able to adapt effectively. In other words, it is crucial for them to

familiarize themselves with their new learning environment, including the school and the culture before they begin their learning. The participant suggested starting this preparation a week before the learning begins.

13. How can the school improve its orientation program and support new Saudi students once they arrive in the U.S.?

The participants agreed that there is a need to make some improvements in the orientation program in order to support new Saudi students adequately once they arrive in the United States. According to Participant 1, one of the key ways of achieving this goal is “perhaps, by providing mentor partners, housing accommodations, and more information on our website targeted to meet their academic needs” (personal communication, October 9, 2018).

On the other hand, Participant 2 asserted that improving this domain will entail doing the following:

How would I improve orientation? Well, I think we should have a full week before they arrive at campus, international students should have a full week of orientation activities to try before the beginning of classes. They shouldn’t have to look around trying to figure out who the Director of International Studies is, where she is, or where they should go to find her? I believe that the university should have ambassadors that will help these students. This way, every international student will have personal mentor-student, and thus personalized assistance that will help them understand the new environment and adjust. The cultural immersion program is already available for those students, and I think it

would make the transition much easier. (Personal communication, October 16, 2018)

Participant 4 identified several ways that the school could use to improve the orientation program for international students and support them once they arrive in the United States. Specifically, after acknowledging that the current strategies lack sufficiency, the school should make some changes. The participant explained that his school has only one person dealing with the issues of international students. Obviously, this is not sufficient because that individual is overwhelmed with such problems, thus being unable to address them all effectively and in a timely manner.

The problem is huge. Lots of names, lots of problems, and a single lady to help them all... And I think that it is not sufficient and the international studies office can do more. I've been to the office many times, but I had no chance even to talk to her 'cause she was overwhelmed. She didn't have time. Also, I don't think she is an academic person, so she doesn't even know what is going on. I hardly doubt she can provide quality help. However, I also believe it is the responsibility of the school to provide high-quality assistance. If this lady cannot, the school should ask another person that will know the entire culture and situation. (Personal communication, October 18, 2018)

Accordingly, this participant identified one essential way of improving the situation. The university should find someone who has enough knowledge of the culture of the Saudi students to assist them in the office. This person should also have enough time to attend to the needs of all students that come.

The participant further added that the person in the international studies office should be highly qualified to provide quality help: “It must be a qualified, well-qualified, very well-qualified individual to give valuable advice, to do processing, to take care, to track down who is doing good and who is not” (Participant 4, personal communication, October 18, 2018). Therefore, this means that a person should be able to advise the students adequately. He or she should also be able to keep track of international students, including monitoring their performance and how they are doing in the new learning environment of the United States.

In addition, according to Participant 4, a qualified individual to perform this role should be highly knowledgeable. This person should be flexible enough rather than follow the set rules and procedures all the time. The same idea is supported by the participant who spoke about a lady working in the office who was not effective since she lacked flexibility: “She knows the rules perfectly and follows them precisely. However, some flexibility is also needed. People are not machines and their problems do not always follow the predetermined scenario” (personal communication, October 18, 2018).

According to this participant, such flexibility is significant because some students need an additional or somewhat different help more than others do. Therefore, the university should be willing to employ a person that would be able to provide such personalized help. He provided an example of such additional help; some students may require advice regarding picking additional courses that will help them finish their studies on time. This is a significant issue since it is common for these international students to pick fewer courses and thus being not able to get their degrees on time. In addition, this

situation results in their embassies withdrawing their support since they could only assist them during the agreed time. Consequently, the student remains alone in a foreign country with no qualifications and no prospects to earn their degree. The participant explained,

Otherwise, it is frustrating. The students don't know when to add a course, which course they should take to finish on time, and what is the number of courses/the number of credits they have to earn. Some of them cope with the task, and others don't. You see, they think that 12 is enough, so they take three or four per semester. However, 12 is not enough. Somebody has to tell them, 'Make it 15! 15, 15, 15!' In this case, they can finish. However, many of them don't know and are not told. You see, and when they don't make it 15, they cannot earn their degree. Then, the Saudi Embassy says: "No way, we cannot fund you," and here the huge problem comes. At this point, little can be done. Unfortunately. (Participant 4, Personal communication, October 18, 2018)

In his turn, Participant 5 asserted that making such improvements involves assisting Saudi students with the challenges that are most frequently encountered by international students:

So, I'm not aware of the situation, but I think international students will probably work to get their tax ID number or Social Security, or whatever that information is. I think the office can help them with acquiring this information and finding housing, for example. Since these issues are most frequently faced by

international students, the International Studies Office should be ready to deal with them effectively. (Personal communication, October 19, 2018)

In the opinion of Participant 8, making improvements for the better orientation of new Saudi students should entail doing the following:

We have to make sure that Saudi students are here in ample time before classes begin so that they can assimilate into the local life. So, maybe we can offer an earlier student orientation outside the U.S. back in their home country. It must be a convenient time for all stakeholders, including the staff, the administration, the family, and of course students. Some schools would ask their international students to come a week before the beginning of classes for effective orientation.

In such a manner, every international student can spend this week either for developing social relationships or for engaging in different cultural activities.

(Personal communication, October 23, 2018)

Therefore, according to this participant, the orientation program can only be effective if international students are able to arrive in the United States in ample time and have enough time before classes to settle everything. It would be useful to provide these students with enough time to make the necessary adjustments before they begin learning.

Participant 6 suggested using current Saudi students and their experience as a help for new students that arrive in the United States. They could provide the most understandable and relevant orientation and support to new Saudi students.

Here is what I think should happen: Saudis who have been here for some time already and have gone through the entire process should share their experience.

They can give the required information, describe the challenges and barriers they faced in the past. I believe that this way, new students will orient better.

Therefore, that experience of Saudi students is very, very helpful in terms of getting them on track. (Personal communication, October 22, 2018)

This is a sound method of providing help to the new students since current students of the same origin have the most accurate knowledge of the challenges that newcomers will face, given that they had faced and managed them in the past. In addition, they will also share the best ways of overcoming these challenges. This peer-based orientation includes providing the new students with adequate advice over where they can be assisted and the particular resources they should request.

Analysis of the Findings

This section provides an analysis of the presented information with an aim of demonstrating the key findings that are derived from these data. This section begins with the analysis of the quantitative data followed by the evaluation of the qualitative data.

Findings from the Quantitative Data

First, this study hypothesized that Saudi students experience a considerable amount of stress as a consequence of cultural differences and necessity to deal with the new environment. Particularly, these stresses are evidenced by the following key experiences: difficulties with understanding the American culture and English language, as well as getting accustomed to American food. This stress as it relates to cultural difference is further confirmed by the negative experience regarding the discrimination of these students because of their religion (Islam), the way of dressing (especially,

traditional apparel), feeling unsafe where they live or go to school, and religious differences.

According to the second key finding that this study found on the basis of the collected quantitative data, stress is caused by cultural differences that affect the students' academic performance. It can be caused by the fact that these students spend too much of their time in stress. For this reason, they are unable to focus on their studies; as a result, this attitude affects their overall academic performance.

Third, this study hypothesized that Saudi students usually experience stress while studying at U.S. universities because of the lack of social integration. Indeed, this lack of social integration was evidenced by the following issues: difficulties with making new friends, negative experience with the staff/administrators, difficulties with socializing with American students, homesickness, the lack of social events for international students on campus, feelings of loneliness and disconnect, the lack of campus-sponsored social activities for international students and their families, and inability to find time to participate in social activities on campus.

Furthermore, this study hypothesized that the stress that Saudi students experience due to the lack of social integration affects their academic performance. Social integration is a crucial aspect of life that contributes to the general wellbeing of humans. This effect emanates from the fact that people usually require some contacts with others. If these students are not able to have interactions with others, more specifically, are rejected by their American counterparts, they are likely to develop stress that, in its turn, will affect their performance at school.

According to another significant finding revealed by the student survey, Saudi students studying at the U.S. universities tend to experience stress caused by their academic environment. The specific factors within this environment that contribute to stress include a difficult program of study, concerns regarding the program not being relevant to their country upon return, inadequate administrative support from the department, insufficient administrative support from the university, difficulties with understanding how American universities work, difficulties with building academic relationships with the faculty, and difficulties with understanding instructions in class.

In addition, another key finding surfacing from the student survey shows that the stress caused by the academic environment influences the Saudi students' academic performance rather negatively. This dependency indicates the need to have a favorable academic environment. Only in such an environment, these students will be able to learn effectively and demonstrate their excellent academic performance.

This study also hypothesized that Saudi students studying at the U.S. universities experience stress that is associated with an inadequate orientation. This idea is confirmed by the survey results which show these students have negative experiences with the orientation, including difficulties with assessing information about studying in the U.S., limited training and possibilities for improving English, inadequate assistance with the paperwork (social security cards and driver licenses), inadequate assistance with housing, and inadequate assistance with finding schools or daycare for children.

Furthermore, another essential key finding revealed by the student survey concerns the stress that is caused by an inadequate orientation and its negative influence

on the academic performance of Saudi students. Since these students are foreigners, they arrive in a country with which they are not familiar, to pursue their studies. In this case, it is vital to provide these students with adequate orientation if they are to adjust to this new country and their learning institution. An inadequate orientation program means that these students will not be prepared enough to deal with the new learning environment. With time, this situation will cause a considerable amount of stress. In the end, this stress will impact the academic performance of these students.

The final finding emerging from the collected quantitative data asserted that some strategies can be put in place to improve the educational experience of Saudi students. Some of these strategies include the creation of a better interaction between the staff/administrators and students, organization of social events for Saudi students and their families, efforts either in or outside the class for the creation of opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American fellows, improving the relevance of programs and courses for Saudi students upon their return to the home country, provision of adequate administrative support to Saudi students, quality mentorship relations with the faculty, and effective orientation for new Saudi students.

Findings from the Qualitative Data

A number of key findings emerged from the analysis of the interviews conducted with faculty, chairs, and deans. In particular, the main themes that emerged in this analysis concern challenges associated with cultural differences, social integration, satisfaction with the academic environment, and orientation.

Accordingly, the first key finding was the existence of cultural differences and their impact on Saudi students and the ways of addressing them. Therefore, one of the findings that was made by this study with respect to the collected qualitative data reported that Saudi students had an English language barrier in both written assignments and in-class discussions. Some Saudi students lacked proficiency in what they wrote while some did not want to participate in in-class presentations due to their poor English.

According to another key finding of this study, faculty members admitted a number of challenges that Saudi students experience on campus. The challenges that were identified in the interviews include the English language barrier, adjustment to the American culture, the lack of sensitivity to the religious needs of Saudi students, some issues of discrimination, and difficulties with following instructors in class. It is essential to mention that many of these challenges were emphasized by students, as well as evidenced in the results of the student survey. This finding implies the need to address these challenges in a timely manner to improve the learning opportunities for these students.

This study further illustrated that this English language barrier affects the student's academic performance. It negatively influences the students' degree of comprehension, as well as their grades and test scores. In addition, the academic performance of these students is further affected since this language barrier affects their overall success.

The study also found that U.S. universities have a responsibility to help Saudi students to improve their English language proficiency. According to the responses

provided by the participants at one university, some of the key support that universities could provide in this area includes the provision of a graduate writing program, encouraging the students to mix with other students, enrolling in the English proficiency course before beginning the university, and asking for help from the faculty members.

Another finding asserted that schools can do a lot to help Saudi students adjust to the American culture. For instance, schools could allow Saudi students to share stories about their culture and share food with their non-Arabic classmates. Other ways to foster adjustment include making these students participate in conferences, group assignments, and shared dinners.

The role of the school can further include demonstrating some form of sensitivity toward and readiness to accommodate the religious needs of international students. Schools can achieve this goal by providing students with day-offs for their religious holidays. Schools could also allow Saudi students to have Friday afternoons free to attend prayers.

Furthermore, schools should address potential issues of discrimination against Saudi students. However, the findings in this study illustrated that schools have not done much to address this issue. Only one participant responded to this question. In addition, his response was not satisfactory; he asserted that his school does not really deal with issues of discrimination.

The second key finding was the social integration of Saudi students. Overall, the responses of participants indicated that schools were highly committed to ensuring the successful social integration of Saudi students. First, this was illustrated by the fact that

there was a generally good relationship towards the interaction between the staff/administrators and students. There were few cases of strained relations. This information was significant as it meant that Saudi students were free enough to approach the staff/administrators for any assistance.

Likewise, according to the interview participants, social integration is further achieved via social events. Schools usually hold social events for Saudi students and their families. According to the interviews, some of these social events include the Cultural Awareness Day, the Saudi Day (when students can taste the food and study the culture of Saudi students), and the International Day.

In addition, evidence of social integration from the responses of participants is revealed through efforts in or outside the class that considers the creation of opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American fellows. Many participants identified the importance of making students work in groups. This is an effective way to facilitate the social integration of international students. This approach requires Saudi students to mix up with American students and work together to solve a common problem.

The third key finding from the interviews was the extent to which Saudi students show satisfaction with the academic environment as described by the faculty. Therefore, this issue is associated with the key changes that have been made by members of the faculty in their programs or courses to improve the relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students to the realities of their home country upon their return. One way of achieving this goal is by demonstrating the interrelation between issues in the United States with those in their home country. This includes utilizing examples in

teaching that could be used in their home country. In addition, the academic environment of these students is also characterized by difficulties in following instructors in class. The faculty members admitted the necessity to use visuals to teach Saudi students, such as lectures posted on the course website. Another key aspect characterizing the academic environment of the Saudi students related to the administrative support that they require and receive. In their responses, members of the faculty asserted that this support was adequate. At the same time, they also pointed out that the students received enough mentorship opportunities. This finding was in contrast to the findings of the student survey since most students held the view that they did not receive adequate support from the faculty. These two viewpoints contradict each other; therefore, this issue requires further research.

The final key finding pertained to the orientation program offered by the schools to its students. Specifically, the study found that the orientation for international students needs to be scheduled before the beginning of the school year. Saudi students should arrive in the United States a week in advance of the start of the semester. This strategy was suggested by many participants. It is crucial to allow these students to familiarize with the country, its culture, life, and their new educational environment. According to the recommendation of some participants, the orientation of these students needs to be improved by improving the work of the international studies office that caters for their needs. In addition, engaging some Saudi students who are already studying in the United States in a peer-based orientation would be helpful as well. These students would be able to share their experiences and help the new students.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the gathered data in a comprehensive and clear manner while emphasizing the necessary facts that illustrated the extent to which Saudi students experienced a variety of stressors while studying at American universities and their influence on the academic performance of these students. This analysis was essential in addressing the key research questions that had been developed for this study. In addition, it was also useful in illustrating the key topics that emerged from the data collected in these following interviews that were held with selected members of the faculty of American schools.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECCOMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine the sources of stress for Saudi students studying at American universities and their impact on academic performance. This chapter begins by discussing results for each research question in relation to past studies. The discussion is followed by implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

Discussion of Survey Findings

RQ1: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to cultural differences?

The main finding related to this question was that Saudi students studying at the U.S. universities do experience stress related to cultural differences. Accordingly, it means that these students tend to feel culturally isolated because of the challenges they face in interacting with other culture and learning the English language. In addition, the findings point to the cultural struggles that Saudi students experience before they assimilate into American life in terms of their successful learning. This finding supports the existing literature. For instance, Woodall, Hiller, and Resnick (2014) asserted that language was the most significant barrier for most Saudi students at American universities. The language is the most significant factor that enhances the levels of stress

that Saudi students experience before fully adapting to the culture and learning in the new country. When these students get the opportunity to understand the language that is being spoken in the United States (i.e., English), they will naturally fit into the environment and will not have to struggle with the challenges of fitting into this new society. More so, aspects such as culture shocks are alleviated with the ability to speak the language of the country in the best ways possible. In addition, Woodall, Hiller, and Resnick (2014) revealed that the social adjustment is associated with significant challenges of cultural differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia, thus exposing these students to excessive cultural stress as they face the pressure to fit into the new society perfectly. According to this finding, further research could be a significant stepping-stone towards understanding the preparation that Saudi students should undergo in their home country to avoid being exposed to cultural stresses once they move to the United States for their study. Investigating ways to help students adjust will ensure that the new country and environment of their learning will not cause stress to them. Therefore, these findings are significant in emphasizing the need to have the Saudi students prepared early enough to face the cultural challenges that they are bound to face and the best way to either manage or avoid significant cultural stresses.

RQ2: To what extent does stress caused by cultural differences impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

According to student survey results, the cultural stress that Saudi students experience at American universities has a negative influence on their academic performance. This is supported by the fact that the majority of the survey respondents

(60%) agreed with this idea, while 7% asserted that their academic performance was significantly affected by the stress that they experience. Therefore, with the increasing levels of stress, most Saudi students find it more challenging to focus on their academic work and succeed. In addition, the findings also reveal that since English is the major language of teaching at U.S. universities, these students face challenges in understanding the instructions and comprehending their learning materials. Subsequently, this language deficiency often contributes to the poor academic performance. Notably, 60% is a significant percentage which means that few students manage to adapt to the new environment quickly to succeed in their academic life. This finding is in line with the research by Rienties, Héliot, and Jindal-Snape (2013) who found that challenges with the language and understanding of the existing cultural realities of a host country put international students in a difficult situation because they cannot establish quality educational and social relationships with other students. If both the language and the culture are complex for the foreign students to understand, they face the challenge of fitting smoothly into the environment and are exposed to the risk of failing in their education because they cannot concentrate in the desirable manner. The result of this stressful experience is the poor academic performance.

Meanwhile, both language and strong social skills are instrumental in boosting the academic excellence of any students. This finding is vital since it emphasizes the importance of teaching English to Saudi students in their home country as early as possible. In other words, Saudi students are to be exposed to the English language environment before coming to the United States. According to Yakunina, Weigold,

Hercegovac, and Elsayed (2013), orienting and guiding students before their admission to the international universities will play an instrumental role in boosting the adjustment process. Language learning is a vital part of this orientation process. Overall, the poor academic performance of students is caused by the inadequate understanding of the language and the challenges associated with building social relationships.

RQ3: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to lack of social integration?

The notable finding concerning this question was that international students continue to face significant challenges in the establishment of social relationships in the foreign country. For instance, 66% of the respondents have a challenge in establishing social interactions with new friends. This finding means that because of differences in cultures and languages, international Arab students find it challenging to interact with other students and members of the staff. In addition, the challenge of establishing social relationships could also be caused by the high level of discrimination that these students experience. This discrimination also contributes to the problem of building strong and lasting social relationships with the rest of students. Earlier research conducted by Rienties, Héliot, and Jindal-Snape (2013) asserted that the social integration is one of the most challenging aspects for international students, especially because of the low engagement in new cultures that they face. The inability to adjust to the international environment effectively also contributes to challenges in the social integration. In line with this finding, Stromquist and Monkman (2014) emphasized that it is vital for international students to prepare themselves to the need to fit into different cultures with

the view of developing positive social relationships. These findings emphasize the significance of preparing students to succeed in the international world, the culture of which is always different. Therefore, certain challenges with social interactions are expected because of the cultural differences; however, they can be mitigated by the early preparation for such issues.

RQ4: To what extent does stress caused by lack of social integration impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

The findings concerning this question pointed to the fact that the absence of social interaction in the host country affects the academic performance of Saudi students. Twelve percent supported the view that the lack of social integration significantly influenced their academic performance at American universities. This finding supports the idea that these students fail to learn with others effectively due to the inability to cooperate in teams because of differences in culture. Saudi students find it challenging to work together with American students because of such cultural issues and fear of discrimination. In addition, the academic performance is affected by the fact that these students do not establish any effective relationships with their instructors because of the same differences. In most cases, the challenge of establishing significant social interactions with both students and faculty affects the academic achievements of these students. This finding corroborates the results of Rienties and Nolan (2014) who noted that positive social networks between international and local students are vital because they promote a positive learning environment. It is crucial for international students to understand the best ways of building positive relationships and creating effective

networks with local students and their instructors if they strive to improve their academic performance. Rienties and Nolan (2014) shared the same view; they asserted that international students can improve the entire learning process when they manage to establish relationships with local students. Such relationships include communicating to these students and sharing vital information within them. The relationships with local students are a critical aspect in regard to understanding the culture of the host country. More so, there is always the avoidance of fear through such interactions. In essence, the relationships are helpful in the processes of learning since students can consult with their classmates and lecturers in the course of learning, thus improving their grades. Generally, this finding emphasizes the importance of engaging in interactions with fellow students without the fear of being discriminated against.

RQ5: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress related to their academic environment?

This research found that a majority of Saudi students experience a number of challenges in U.S. universities related to their academic environment. The main challenge is associated with the inability to understand the American educational programs. For instance, international students have to deal with issues that they did not expect to appear in the program or have challenges with understanding the curriculum. The stress associated with the thought of the applicability of the academic programs to the career field in their home country is also huge. That is, students lack confidence in their ability to get good jobs after graduation; these thoughts can become another source of stress. In addition, support of the faculty and administration is always a significant motivation for

international students to achieve academic success, without experiencing stress. On the other hand, the lack of such support means that students are isolated and have no one to ask questions about the curriculum and assignments, thus causing additional stress to them. Similarly, in the literature, Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010) noted that international students should live in a friendly environment, so that their satisfaction and academic performance can be enhanced. In other words, the level of satisfaction is higher when the environment provides students with maximum support. The support always includes being oriented on the information about the institution that they have joined, the rules and regulations, and the program that they will be pursuing at the host institution. This helps the students understand the significance of being in the community and also helps avoid the potential stresses that they are bound to face. Otherwise, the students are always bound to be stressed; in its turn, such a situation will affect their academic achievement in the new academic environments. Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers (2012) also emphasized the difficulties that these students have with the transition from their home to a new learning environment. The transition is always challenging especially because they are always moving to a new country where they are unfamiliar with the operations of the country and the cultural standings. This change affects their academic performance because of the stress that they suffer because of this unfamiliarity. Therefore, this finding is critical in explaining the significance of improving the learning environment for international students. The environment should strive to eliminate any chances of stress, thus allowing them to achieve the set goals in the best ways possible.

RQ6: To what extent does stress caused by the academic environment impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

This study revealed that stress that is caused by the academic environment has negative effects on the academic performance. A significant number of students who responded to the survey (20%) affirmed that stresses in their academic environment had a significant impact on their performance. This finding means that students find it difficult to concentrate on their academic work when they do not understand the academic program or do not have adequate support from the faculty. Subsequently, these stresses make students face instances of being unable to track own academic work and program; consequently, their academic performance suffers. Most stresses that are caused by the learning environment are results of discomfort that international students experience and problems of fitting into the new environment that they face. This results agreed with the findings of Lee (2007) who pointed out that communication between international and local students sets the ground for effective cooperation, boosts confidence, and ensures participation of all in the class activities, thus improving the performance of both. These students get the opportunity to share information with each other hence leading to the realization of what they expect both academically and culturally within the new country. When there is no formal communication between international and host students, there are increased chances of the poor academic performance. Tan and Winkelman (2014) further confirmed that stresses in the academic environment negatively affect the learning of international students. Therefore, the outcome is always a poor academic performance because of the inappropriate coping mechanisms. Both the available literature and the

findings of the current research confirm that stresses in the learning environment lead to the unsatisfactory academic performance for international students. This finding suggests the importance of developing a supportive learning environment for international students.

RQ7: To what extent do Saudi students studying at U.S. universities experience stress associated with an inadequate orientation?

Regarding this question, it was established that various factors, including the difficulties of finding information, limited opportunities to improve English, challenges with finding housing, and challenges with finding schools or daycare for children are the key sources of stress for Saudi students that are caused by inadequate orientation.

According to these findings, information is the best tool for students that they can use to assimilate into their new environments in the foreign country easily. It is always vital for students to possess the required information or know where to find one to have an opportunity to adjust to their new environment and prevent the development of stress and its consequences. Zhang and Goodson (2011) supported the findings of the current study by sharing the view that training and orientation are crucial for students who move to foreign countries to study. Orientation is important because it presents the needed information in terms of expectations that are to be met once they arrive in the new country. More so, orientation works positively by giving these students the opportunity to gain confidence about their new environments and teaching them how to handle the unexpected events that might arise in their environments. On the other hand, the lack of orientation is disadvantageous to students because it makes it challenging for them to get

into the country and adjust to the new way of living. Understanding the host country in terms of the availability of social amenities and ways to behave and interact with people is important for foreign students to in order to avoid stresses that they might experience in the host country. Therefore, the findings of this study are helpful in advocating for a more effective orientation of students, before their departure to another country to study.

RQ8: To what extent does stress caused by an inadequate orientation impact Saudi students' academic performance at American universities?

The findings of this study indicated that an inadequate orientation affects the academic performance of Saudi students at American universities. It is worth noting that 19% noted that stress emanating from inadequate orientation is a significant cause of the poor academic performance. The lack of orientation means that students cannot achieve a high level of understanding of their curriculum, thus getting poor grades. In addition, the lack of orientation makes it difficult for students to develop a clear understanding of what is required of them academically, hence causing struggles in the attainment of quality results. However, there is limited empirical evidence in the available literature to support the view that the lack of orientation affects the academic performance of international students studying abroad. The gap in the literature concerning this issue requires additional research that will aim at studying the significance of orientation for foreign students with the purpose of boosting their academic success. Nevertheless, according to the study conducted by Zhang and Goodson (2011), a proper orientation is important for boosting the familiarization of students with their environment, hence bringing them in

the position to perform well academically. Otherwise, the risk of poor performance is high.

Discussion of Interview Findings

RQ9: What are the challenges that Saudi students experience on campus as perceived by faculty and administrators?

According to the findings of this study, there were numerous challenges that Saudi students experience, including the language barrier, challenges in adjusting to the American culture, discrimination, and even difficulties with following instructions in class. It is worth noting that these challenges make it difficult for international students to learn effectively because of the associated stresses they have to manage. The lack of understanding of the U.S. culture aggravated the challenges that they face in the host country. This finding concerning the challenges emphasized the role of cultural differences that create significant problems for many students that move to international schools to advance their studies. The same views were present in the available literature. Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) asserted that students from Asian and Arab regions face more challenges while studying in the United States as compared to those from European countries. The understanding of the differences emanates from the fact that there is a significant cultural difference between these two continents. There is no form of common cultural perspectives, which makes it more challenging for these students to adjust to the new environments. This situation is mainly caused by the cultural shock that Arab students encounter when they move to America. Generally, Saudi students have to cope

with many challenges in the United States. The increasing stress is a consequence of the cultural shock and a cause of the poor academic performance for many Saudi students.

RQ10: How can Saudi students' educational experiences be improved from the perspective of faculty and administrators?

The findings indicated that there are various avenues for the improvement of Saudi students' educational experience. This can be achieved by utilizing such strategies as participating in social events, interacting and communicating in and outside the class, acquiring proper orientation, participating in mentorship programs, and improving the relevance of academic programs. Accordingly, the availability of different avenues to improve the educational experience of students will lead to improved learning and the focus on academic achievements while being able to overcome the stresses that they face. These findings mean that administrators will be more caring about the needs of Saudi students and will strive to support them in the most effective way. This need for administrative support is emphasized by the existing literature as well. Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010) explained the importance of the faculty support to the success of international students. Faculty members are supposed to make these students feel at home by being there to address their needs at any given time. Support of the faculty boosts the satisfaction of students with their academic environment. As a result, they are able to attain the academic goals that brought them to the United States. The role of the faculty is positive because it also makes these students feel appreciated by the fact that they are welcomed by universities that are ready to provide them with support and assistance.

Generally, this finding suggests that the university administration has to do everything possible to help Saudi students assimilate well into the American life.

**1A, B. Have you or your faculty noticed any Saudi students with the English language barrier in written assignments and/or in-class discussions?
Please explain.**

The key findings indicated that the faculty had noticed a language barrier in written assignments and discussions that Saudi students face in different classes. The language barrier was reported in the process of writing. The participants in the study agreed that the language barrier plays a key detrimental role in the academic performance of students. Consequently, the majority agreed upon the necessity of the university to support these students and help them improve their language proficiency. These findings lead to the understanding of the extent of challenges that Saudi students face in their academic life because of the inability to use the English language effectively. This finding is in agreement with the results of Misra and Castillo (2004) who asserted that the presence of the language barrier affects the ability of the majority of international students to engage in class discussions effectively, thus being unable to improve their class performance. The same idea is reiterated by Smith and Khawaja (2011) who noted that the language barrier impacts Asian and Arab international students more as compared to European international students in the United State, thus lowering their academic performance. This finding suggests the need to better support Saudi students learn the language and be in a position to perform well academically.

2. What does your school do to help Saudi students adjust to the American culture?

The key findings revealed that American schools help Saudi students adjust to the local culture by first giving them a platform to share their understandings of cultural differences and then addressing their needs through the international studies office. These findings mean that some efforts have been made to make sure that Saudi students adjust culturally to the new learning environment in the United States in the best way possible. The findings support ideas discussed in the literature regarding the significance of orientation. Zhang and Goodson (2011) emphasized the significance of training and orientation, as well. Whatever schools do to help these students adjust to the American culture, they should ensure that students can orient and assimilate into society immediately when they arrive in the new country. Overall, while trying to assimilate into the American culture with the support of their schools, Saudi students can appreciate cultural differences of all classmates better and learn in a more effective manner.

3. What does your school do to demonstrate sensitivity toward and readiness to accommodate the religious needs of Saudi students?

Schools are expected to be sensitive to the religious needs of students, especially because of the tension that exists between students from different religions. One of the important findings in this study points to the idea that schools are responsible for demonstrating their sensitivity to the needs of Saudi students by giving them opportunities to observe their religious holidays and practice religious traditions. For instance, at the university where the interviews were conducted, Muslim students from

Saudi Arabia are allowed to attend prayers every Friday and observe Muslim holidays. It is worth noting that for every believer, religious matters are of great value; therefore, it is always vital to show readiness and willingness to accommodate associated needs by allowing them to live according to their worldview with a desirable level of freedom. The literature has failed to explain the issue of the religious accommodation for Saudi and other Arab students that move to the United States to study. Nevertheless, it is clear that the religious needs of these students always need to be supported by their schools that strive to help them feel appreciated in their new environment. When their religions are appreciated, students develop the motivation to remain focused on their studies without the need to worry about their religious needs while not being religiously isolated by the school. Therefore, this finding is crucial since it offers the school administration guidance on religious accommodations for students from Arab countries.

4. What does your school do to address potential issues of discrimination against Saudi students?

Discrimination was a prevalent issue for most Saudi students because of the cultural differences. The findings of this study revealed that schools have focused on the appointment of point persons to monitor any form of discrimination against Saudi students. Nevertheless, no cases of discrimination were reported according to the data gathered in interviews. The absence of discrimination against Saudi students means that these students have an opportunity to express their unique identities and learn without any fear. As opposed to the mentioned reports from students provided in this study, the literature offers a different view. For instance, Ghaffari (2011) argued that Saudi students

are exposed to discrimination and alienation in western universities. The difference between the findings of this study and the literature means that the challenge is to be further investigated to find out the true position and support these students against discrimination if any is detected. Eradication of any discrimination will help these students focus on their academic work since they will not feel alienated in the host country, in general, and in their academic environment, in particular. Efforts toward fighting discrimination also play a vital role in making schools safe havens for the students to work toward the attainment of their goals without any form of fear. Academic performance is also promoted by the students' understanding of the safety of their environment.

5. Describe the interaction between the staff/administrators and students.

Have you noticed any strained relations? If yes, how did these strained relationships influence the students' academic performance?

As a part of social relationships, interactions between students and staff/administrators were also critical to boosting the learning environment for international students. Regarding this question, the key finding indicates that positive relationships between Saudi students and the staff/administrators do exist; in addition, no instances of strained relationships were reported. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all responses were based on personal experience of faculty at one institution, thus, it might be difficult to generalize these data. However, according to this research, a good relationship between students and the staff members is a positive indication of the existence of the favorable environment that allows these students to pursue their academic goals

effectively and freely. This finding supports the research of Rienties and Nolan (2014) who asserted that the creation of networks between international students and the rest of the class, as well with members of the staff, influences the overall learning outcomes. In the case of effective communication and cooperation with the staff, students can avoid stress and focus on achieving their academic goals. This way, the learning environment for Saudi students is made more interesting with the help and support of the staff members.

6. Describe any social events your school organizes for Saudi students and their families. How can these activities be improved?

Social activities play an instrumental role in boosting the integration of students and even their communities into the host environment. The findings from the interviews suggested that many schools respect and organize events for Saudi students and their families. Examples of such events were described by study participants; they included the International Day and the Cultural Awareness Day. Additionally, the students opine that these events can be improved by inviting host students to celebrations and encouraging them to engage in such activities actively. The involvement in social events is crucial for Saudi students since they can feel appreciated and a part of the host society.

Consequently, instead of worrying because of this stress factor, they can focus on their academic performance. In addition, in such an environment, they acquire the feeling that their culture is appreciated by their school, and thus do not suffer from additional stresses within their institutions. At these events, the international students get the opportunity to learn the culture of the host country, thus lowering own stress level that they are bound to

experience in the new environment. In recent literature, Lee and Ciftci (2014) asserted that such level of social integration can help students develop self-confidence and overcome the anxiety that they face because of the cultural shock. In other words, it is easier for students to learn and understand their new environment by participating in social activities organized by their schools.

7. Describe any efforts either in or outside the class aimed at creating opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American fellows. How can these efforts be improved?

Various responses were given on this question. The key findings revealed that the efforts aimed at creating opportunities for the interaction of students in the class have been primarily geared toward having them learn in groups. On the other hand, the interactions outside the class have been implemented mainly through the invitation of American students to Saudi social events. Regarding the improvement of such interactions, special opportunities for learning English for Saudi students were suggested as the best approach. Accordingly, if Saudi students have an opportunity to interact with American students both inside and outside the classroom, they will feel less discriminated. Also, they will gain the confidence required for learning more about the new culture, in which they find themselves. The available literature agrees with these findings. Lee and Ciftci (2014) explained that students must have opportunities for the social integration both inside and outside the classroom to ensure that they are getting the best from their relationship with students in the host country. For instance, social support offered by universities can help these students adjust to their new environment. In turn,

schools have to keep improving opportunities for the interaction between students of different origin. This finding will contribute to the success of interaction programs that are launched by educational institutions to increase meaningful interactions between international and host students.

8. Describe any changes you made to your program or courses to improve the relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students upon their return to home country.

Students studying in foreign countries always worry about the applicability of their U.S. education in their countries. The interviews revealed that both courses and programs have been modified at the examined institution to improve the relevance of the educational experience of Saudi students to the environment of their home countries. For instance, students are asked to write about the realities of the native land in their dissertations and other written assignments, or research the influence of some issues on their communities. Such programs help these students take the knowledge gained at international schools back home and emphasize the significance of learning in the United States that can help them improve their own country. This issue relates to the aspect of instructional delivery that is studied in the available literature. Zhang (2016) opined that the delivery of academic instruction to international students helps them learn effectively in varying learning environments, and thus boost own academic and life success.

Learning programs and courses always need to be designed in a way to ensure that students get the best from their learning process and that the earned knowledge and skills

are relevant to their countries. In other words, the curriculum should be meaningful to all students.

9. Have you or other faculty members noticed that Saudi students have difficulties with following instructors in class?

This study shows that Saudi students experience challenges with following instructions in class. Obviously, the main language of the classroom instruction delivery in the United States is English. Since most Saudi students are not proficient in the English language, they struggle with following instructions that are delivered in the classroom. The language barrier is a significant element of the whole learning mechanism; without the proper understanding of English, the learning process becomes challenging. A similar idea can be found in the available literature. Li, Chen, and Duanmu (2010) emphasized that the significant language barriers that are experienced by students from Asian and Arab countries make it more challenging for these students to learn effectively. The inability to follow communication in the English language makes it difficult for foreign students to understand the information and instructions given by teachers in the classroom. As a result, difficulties with following class instructions affect the academic performance of students. However, Smith and Khawaja (2011) suggested that the language is not always a barrier to the academic success of these students because the understanding of classroom instructions also depends on the willingness to learn and effectively adapt to the new culture. This finding reinforces the need to make Saudi students understand the importance of mastering English and be ready to learn in this language to attain success in their academic life in the United States.

10. According to you, is administrative support provided to Saudi students adequate? If not, what is to be improved?

The majority of the faculty interviewed indicated that, even though a special office for international students functioned at their schools, Saudi students did not receive sufficient administrative support. They received adequate help only in few cases; thus, the international office is not doing enough. For instance, the interviews emphasized the need to improve the way of managing the cultural needs of international students. In addition, rules and regulations of the institutions should be neither confusing nor pressing to international students that want to get the best from their learning environment. The absence of adequate administrative support is not good for these students because such a situation affects their focus on learning; instead, they remain confused about the events at their institutions. The absence of an administrative support affects the student's satisfaction with the learning environment. In the existing literature, Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010) noted that the faculty's readiness to interact and support international students has various implications for students' learning outcomes. With more support, students would always develop a positive approach to their learning process because of being satisfied with their learning environment. This finding urges the American universities to offer maximum support to international students to help them understand their learning environment and exist in it effectively.

11. Do you think Saudi students are provided with adequate opportunities to build quality mentorship relations with the faculty at your school? If not, what is to be improved?

According to the findings of this study, Saudi students have been given extensive opportunities for engaging in mentorship relationships that are meant to help them learn. This aim is achieved with the help of academic advisors and opportunities for sharing significant information with their professors. The availability of adequate mentorship relationships with the faculty members at their schools means that these students can enjoy quality relationships with their advisors. In turn, quality relationships with the faculty allow students to perform well and work toward the attainment of their goals. In addition, mentorship opportunities are of primary importance since they help these students adapt effectively to their new learning environment and ensure a high academic performance. The same dependence is clearly explained in the available literature. Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010) stated that differences in the interaction with the faculty and different communication styles used by members of the faculty determine the student's satisfaction with the academic environment and thus their academic performance to a great extent. This means that mentorship opportunities increase the strength of the relationship between international students and the faculty and also play an instrumental role in improving the satisfaction of students with their learning environment. This finding is critical since it demonstrates the need to boost the students' satisfaction with the learning environment and provide them with the opportunity to succeed in the international learning environment.

12. Is there any orientation program for new Saudi students at your school?

If yes, please describe any assistance with settling students get before the beginning of the academic year.

Interview participants admitted that a form of orientation is provided to Saudi students at the institution examined in the case study. The major assistance is provided under the program offered by the office of international studies. The office helps students settle before the beginning of the new academic year and familiarizes them with various departments. Even though these students receive some assistance, it is rather limited. The assistance provided by the office of international studies is vital since it helps foreign students fit into the new environment and develop a positive attitude toward it within the shortest time possible to learn effectively. Orientation also helps mitigate the stress that these students experience when they find themselves in the new learning environment in the United States. Nevertheless, research on the significance of orientation for students to adjust to the new environment is limited. Zhang and Goodson (2011) explained the significance of orientation and training in general terms. They stated that orientation helps individuals from other countries to settle in the host country comfortably. They knew what to do since they had been briefed on what they should do and where should find help. The orientation programs that the students undergo at their respective schools prepare them to handle any challenges and deal with the cultural shock in the most effective way. This finding encourages American schools to adopt effective orientation programs that will help their international students settle well in the new country.

13. How can the school improve its orientation program and support new Saudi students once they arrive in the United States?

The interviews revealed that there are still avenues for improving the orientation program for Saudi students that arrive in the United States. Specifically, the findings

suggested that orientation can be improved by providing a full week of activities to help new students understand their new environments. These activities should engage individuals that understand the Saudi culture. Also, students should be provided with ample time to familiarize before the beginning of classes. This means that these students should be provided with better support when they go to the United States so that they can settle and adapt within the shortest time possible to pursue their studies without any significant challenges caused by the new learning environment. In addition, they will not be confused about their courses if adequate orientation strategies are put in place. Leaving these students to suffer in the course of trying to find their way around the university can be highly stressful, and thus affect the quality of their learning. Even though this aspect has not been researched in the available literature, it is crucial to make orientation more efficient since most students complained that it is not as efficient as they expected it to be. This finding suggested that international studies offices at American schools be well-equipped to provide international students with proper assistance for orientation.

Implications

The findings of the current study have certain implications for both Saudi and American schools, Saudi students moving to the United States to study, and the future practice related to these studies. Obviously, students that come from Saudi Arabia to the U.S. are not fully aware of the cultural shock that they are going to experience in their new learning environments.

The findings of this study require Saudi schools to understand the fact that some of their students will enter international schools to advance their studies. With this understanding, Saudi schools are in a better position to design the most effective ways of preparing their students for their future and help them avoid at least some challenges associated with the relocation to other countries such as the United States. This means that, because of this research, most Saudi schools will have to prioritize the English language in their curriculum to prepare these students to deal with the new environment in America. This strategy will ensure that students do not experience the language barrier when they move to the new country. In addition, Saudi schools need to understand the importance of teaching students about the American culture and worldview so that these students become aware of what they are going to face in the host country. Moreover, Saudi schools are expected to not only emphasize the teaching of the Saudi culture to their students but also expose them to international cultures. It is worth noting that the schools play a crucial role in the preparation of students before they move abroad. The current confusion that these students experience once they move to the foreign countries will be either alleviated or at least mitigated. Saudi students will not have to struggle with the language barrier. Based on the findings of the study, the whole approach to teaching by Saudi schools is to be changed in the nearest future with the view of preparing their students to face and manage challenges upon their arrival in other countries, for example, America. Saudi schools are expected to be active participants in the process of preparing their students to international schools.

Additionally, the findings of this research have significant implications for American schools that welcome international students. For most schools in the U.S., having international students is a privilege because it proves their popularity and the high quality of the academic programs they offer. One of the most significant implications of this research for American schools is that they need to focus more on programs for international students to ensure that they assimilate into the life in the country and school in the best ways possible. Prioritizing the needs of these students is an effective way of attract more applicants from abroad. In addition, American schools should develop a better understanding of how to integrate and engage their students to ensure that they do not feel isolated. Allowing students to study and work together in class alongside American students is perhaps the most effective strategy to enhance their integration; as a result, international students are offered a unique opportunity to study the culture directly and effectively. Additionally, there is the expectation of the fact that in tandem with the current study, American schools will find the encouragement to research and understand the best ways of ensuring that new international students are oriented fully before beginning their classes. This could entail the understanding of their school environments and the overall process of student interaction. For instance, as part of the expectation, American schools will work toward ensuring that international students are helped to experience the culture and understand the curriculum to ensure that their academic performance is not affected by any cultural challenges. In essence, the major implication is that American schools are going to become more responsive to the needs of

international students by helping them settle well at their host institutions and familiarize them with their new learning environment.

This research also has certain implications for Saudi students themselves. Since these students are the ones going to America to study, they are expected to make individual efforts to prepare themselves for the new challenging environment that is unknown to them. The faculty interviews demonstrated that some Saudi students are shy; therefore, it is challenging for them to adjust to the new environment because they are afraid of asking questions. Thus, one of this research's implications is that Saudi student need to become confident enough to fit into the American culture without the fear of being victimized. The expectation is that because of this research, students will be in a better position to open up and share what they do not understand about academic matters and cultural norms so that they can fit into American society well. In addition, it is expected that Saudi students will be able to understand the best ways of developing vital networks and relationships at their host institution. As a result, they will not have to struggle with the culture shock once they arrive in the new country. In addition, the research strives to motivate these students to take initiative and learn about the new culture of the host country so that they do not suffer from the stress associated with living away from their countries. This attitude will also help them share these abilities with their fellow students that want to enter international schools upon graduation.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current research has certain implications for future research that focuses on international students in foreign countries. This study focused particularly on the

challenges that Saudi students experience as they move to study to the United States. It emphasized challenges that students experience in the new country, thus revealing some gaps in both Saudi and America school systems, which seem not to do enough to help these students adjust properly to the multicultural environment that they have to experience.

Future research should aim to explore effective ways of overcoming the challenges that Saudi students experience in the United States. The current research has focused on the problems that Saudi students face; therefore, now, it is sound to define the best ways of addressing and eliminating these challenges. The future research should focus on strategies that could be adopted at home before these students move to foreign countries to study. For instance, researchers should consider both Saudi and U.S. strategies aimed at managing the challenges and thus helping these students cope with them. With the focus on the curriculum, Saudi students will receive a better preparation that will allow them to fit into another culture and overcome any challenges caused by this culture.

In addition, future studies will have to consider the methodological limitations of the current work. The first element that is to be improved is the focus population. Future studies should gather information from faculty from different U.S. universities. This will improve the representativeness of the sample and allow for the generalization of the findings that will be gathered in these studies. With a wider focus population, the findings will be applied to universities hosting all Saudi students across the entire United States. In addition, the sampling approaches that are applied to the collection of student survey

data will need to be improved to involve other sampling approaches, including random sampling, for example, that gives every participant an equal opportunity to participate in the study. This way, the study's results will be attained without bias on the part of the researcher.

Limitations of the Study

The study was affected by various methodological limitations that could have impacted its findings. The first significant limitation of the study was the fact that its qualitative elements only focused on the collection of data at the minority-serving research university located in the Southeast region of the United States. The particular focus on this minority-serving university could have affected the findings because the views presented by Saudi students at the institution cannot be generalized to the rest of the U.S. universities. The findings are meaningful if they can be generalized to the rest of the population. Therefore, the main limitation of the study is the fact that it gathered views from faculty at only one educational institution. The views shared by faculty who were interviewed in this study cannot be used for understanding what other faculty at other United States institutions face in general. The university examined in this case study has about 400 Saudi students; even though this number is high, another limitation is associated with the methodology since Saudi students study at numerous universities across the United States and face unique challenges there. Whatever Saudi students can face at the minority-serving university does not provide the full picture of challenges that Arab students face at American universities in general.

The second significant limitation of the study is that it entailed the use of convenience sampling for student surveys and purposive sampling for faculty interviews. As much as both convenience and purposive samplings allow the researcher to save time on reaching the needed respondents, they do not provide the researcher with an opportunity to select the respondents fairly. Particularly, convenience sampling is a significant limitation of the study because it is highly vulnerable to bias and sampling errors. The bias affects the results in the sense that they cannot be generalized to the rest of the population. The convenience sample that was selected will not be effective in understanding the overall challenges that Saudi students in the United States face and the best ways of ensuring that they are managed in the required manner. In the same way, purposive sampling limits the quality of the attained results because it is prone to the research bias. The researcher has a lot of control over the choice of participants, and thus chooses them according to personal, usually biased, preferences. In tandem with the bias that emanates from both methods, it is challenging to attain the desirable quality of results that could be utilized to understand the overall population. Notably, it is always significant to make sure that the methodologies are utilized in the best ways possible for the sake of boosting the outcomes of the study and the attainment of the required level of results.

Recommendations

In tandem with the study's findings, several recommendations were developed for both the policy-makers and administrators, as well as for educational researchers concerning the improvement of the research methodologies in the future.

Recommendations for Saudi Policy Makers

The first recommendation is that Saudi schools should adopt English into their curriculum to alleviate the struggle with the language barrier that Saudi students experience when they move to study to such countries as the United States. Among the key challenges identified in the findings is the fact that Saudi students are finding it difficult to integrate into the U.S. culture because of the language barrier. Accordingly, they experience significant challenges in their academic assignments and cooperation with fellow students. In this regard, Saudi policymakers are recommended to focus on the development of effective educational policies that will prioritize the learning of English instead of using Arabic as the only language of learning. The recommendation can be implemented by gradually introducing the English language into the curriculum so that students, especially those that want to move abroad to learn, could master it. The learning of the English language will allow these students to avoid challenges with the language barrier that can endanger their academic success.

Recommendations for U.S. Higher Education Administrators

The second recommendation concerns administrators of universities in the United States. Administrators should improve the orientation of Saudi students culturally, as well as by familiarizing them with the environment in which they will learn and live. According to the findings, most Saudi students expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of orientation that they received once they moved to the new country. Even despite the presence of the office for international studies, it is crucial to improve the orientation assistance by engaging individuals with an in-depth understanding of the Saudi culture in

conducting these programs. With the need to improve the office effectiveness in regard to attending to the students' needs, its staff can be expanded to have more individuals that will support international students and help them understand the American culture. Concerning the academic orientation, most students complained that there was limited time for them to get oriented and this fact made it more challenging to select or change courses. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the orientation period by at least a week to allow these students to familiarize themselves with the learning environment and programs that they are going to undertake. This improved orientation will help new students manage their confusion and deal with problems with their academic work.

Additionally, administrations of U.S. schools should develop and implement more programs to assist Saudi students to integrate into the American culture in the shortest time possible. Apart from allowing these students to celebrate their national holidays, other social events, for example, cultural events can be organized to help Saudi students share their culture and worldview and integrate into the American culture smoothly. By having the chance to participate in different cultural programs, Saudi students will not have to struggle with their identity but will effectively fit into the host culture. Therefore, stresses that are associated with assimilating into the American lifestyle will be overcome at this stage. Consequently, students will focus on achieving their academic goals that brought them to the United States.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the current study. First, one can assert that Saudi students face significant cultural barriers in the United States. It was established in

the study that the cultural challenges are caused by the fact that in the beginning, these students cannot learn and understand the American culture and worldview. In essence, the language barrier is a significant contributor to the cultural challenges that students face in the United States. The shyness of Saudi students also exposes them to increased cultural challenges once they arrive in the United States to study. Therefore, according to the results of the study, it can be concluded that cultural challenges are a significant part of the problems that Saudi students experience in the new country. With this idea in mind, it is crucial to develop an effective framework to help these students integrate into the American culture once they come to the United States. They are to feel themselves a part of the country and the classroom by being assimilated into the life of the host country.

A second significant conclusion that could be drawn from the current study is that, as a consequence of the cultural and language barriers that Saudi students face in the United States, they are exposed to significant stress, which consequently affects their academic performance and overall wellbeing. While in the United States, Saudi students face challenges with feeling accommodated into the society as they have to struggle with not only communicating but also building relationships within the host cultural network. The inability to communicate and also fit into the culture is always stressful to these students; therefore, it has critically affected the academic performance of Saudi students in the United States. The key contributor to the poor academic performance is the inability to follow the instructions in the English language. As a result, the better

integration of Saudi students into the American environment is critical since it can boost their academic performance and success in the future.

A third conclusion suggested by this study is that measures aimed at orienting Saudi students in the United States are not sufficient. Some of the measures include establishing an international studies office at educational institutions in order to take students through various departments. However, having an international students' office is not enough; Saudi students feel isolated because of the inadequate orientation that is offered to them. The inadequate orientation opportunities for Saudi students in the United States are evidenced by the challenges that these students experience in the course of their study. Usually, they are not able to settle immediately in the country and thus are unable to focus on their academic goals. The deficiency in the orientation of students is also evidenced by the limited time that is dedicated to taking them across their course and communicating to them what is expected of them in terms of rules and regulations. Therefore, more should be done to improve the orientation of Saudi students at American schools.

Overall, based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that Saudi students face numerous challenges that must be addressed holistically by different stakeholders. The challenges range from cultural differences and the language barrier to orientation problems. With all these challenges in mind, it is obvious that more is to be done in terms of helping the students accommodate and overcome stresses that they face in their new academic environment. This approach will also contribute to the better performance of Saudi students in their academic life and lead to high grades and

proficient knowledge. Leaving the problems unaddressed will be rather disadvantageous to international students as the status quo might discourage new applicants from going to study in the United States. Therefore, the suggested course of action is to modify the approach of handling Saudi students by allowing them to fit effectively into the American culture without fear.

APPENDIX A

Universities Represented in the Survey Sample

University	Number of respondents
Arizona State University	2
AUM	1
Ball State University	1
Brenau University	3
Cal Tech	1
California State University	2
Claremont Graduate University	1
Clark Atlanta University	31
Clayton State University	1
Colorado State University	4
Concordia University Chicago	1
CWRU	1
ECU	1
Edgewood College	1
FDU	1
Florida A&M University	2
Florida International University	1
Frostburg State University	1
FSU	1
George Mason	1
Georgia State University	2
Howard university	1
Idaho	1
IUPUI	3
Kansas University	1
Kent State University	3
Life University	3
Maywood University	1
Mercer University	2
Michigan State University	1
Missouri University, Columbia	1
MSSU	1
NCSU	1
New York University	1

(continued)

University	Number of respondents
Northern Illinois University	2
NOVA	1
Oklahoma State University	1
Old Dominion University Virginia	2
Penn State	1
Regis College	1
Robert Morris University	1
Sacred Heart University	1
Saginaw Valley State University	1
San Diego	1
Savannah College of Art and Design	1
Shippensburg University	1
SIUC	1
South Dakota State University	2
Southern Illinois University	1
St Edwards	1
SWOSU	1
Texas A&M, Kingsville	1
Texas Tech	1
The Ohio State University	2
TSU	1
Tufts university	1
Tulane University	1
UB	1
UCL	1
UH	1
UIC	1
UIUC	1
UMASS	1
UNCG	1
Univ. at Buffalo (SUNY@Buffalo)	1
University of Central Florida	1
University of Central Missouri	3
University of Cincinnati	2
University of Dayton	1
University of Delaware	1
University of Denver	1
University of Florida	3
University of Kansas	1
University of Michigan - Ann Arbor	2
University of Missouri - St Louis	2
University of Missouri-Columbia	1

(continued)

University	Number of respondents
University of Nebraska Medical Center	1
University of Northern Iowa	1
University of Rhode Island	1
University of South Florida	7
University of Tennessee	1
University of Texas	1
University of West Alabama	1
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee	1
University of Kansas	1
UNM	1
USC	1
UWM	2
Valparaiso University	1
Wayne State University	1
Western Michigan University	12

APPENDIX B

Stress Indicators Questionnaire

My name is Fahad Alsharari. I am doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership program at Clark Atlanta University. My advisor is Dr. Daniel Teodorescu. As part of my doctoral program in Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at CAU, I am conducting a study examining stressors among the Saudi students studying at U.S. universities and their impact of academic performance.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as a Saudi student. The purpose of this study is to help contribute to the advancement of international education by building a better understanding of stress factors affecting the Saudi students 'academic performance at U.S. universities.

The benefit of this study is that it will provide data that can be used to better inform institutional policy which can be used as a best practices model. No direct benefits are being offered to individual participants. The study will consist of the administration of a single survey examining the effects of stress on international students' academic performance. It is estimated that your participation will take approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your grades, academic standing, or your relationship with the University. The direct anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

Your responses will remain confidential and your identity will not be revealed. In order to protect the confidentiality of you as a participant and your responses throughout the study and publication of study results, data collected from this survey will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office in the Department of Educational Leadership at Clark Atlanta University. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

The data file will be destroyed at the conclusion of study. If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me, Fahad Alsharari, at fahad.alsharari@students.cau.edu or Dr. Daniel Teodorescu, my committee chair, at dteodorescu@cau.edu. If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Clark Atlanta University's Human Subjects Review Board at 404.880.6829 or pmusey@cau.edu.

The following question will give you the opportunity to decide whether or not you wish to participate in this survey. I thank you in advance for your time and participation. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study titled “An analysis of factors that impact Saudi student learning outcomes in American higher education institutions: Exploration of faculty, administrators and students’ perceptions.” The researcher will keep any data collected under electronic encryption and password protection, and is not collecting any information that can be used to identify any individual person.

Yes, I would like to participate _____

No, I do not wish to participate _____

Section I. Cultural Differences

During the last academic term, how often would you say you felt stressed because of the following?

- 5 = Always (five days per week)
- 4 = Most of the time (three days per week)
- 3 = Some of the time (less than two hours per week)
- 2 = Almost never (less than an hour per week)
- 1 = Never

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Almost Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always
Difficulty understanding the American culture					
Difficulty with the English language					
Difficulty being accustomed to American food					
Negative experiences with discrimination toward Muslim students					
Difficulty related to differences in dressing and apparel					
Feeling unsafe where I now live or go the school.					
Difficulty related to religious differences					

To what extent has the stress caused by cultural differences affected negatively your academic performance?

- (1) No impact _____
 (2) To some extent _____
 (3) To a great extent _____

Section II. Social Integration

During the last academic term, how often would you say you felt stressed because of:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Almost Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always
Difficulty making new friends					
Negative experiences with staff/administrators interactions					
Difficulty socializing with American students					
Homesickness					
Lack of social events for international students on campus					
Feelings of loneliness and disconnect					
Lack of campus-sponsored social activities for international students and their families					
Not finding the time to participate in social activities on campus					

To what extent has the stress caused by lack of social integration affect negatively your academic performance?

- (1) No impact _____
 (2) To some extent _____
 (3) To a great extent _____

Section III. Satisfaction with the Academic Environment

During the last academic term, how often would you say you felt stressed because of:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Almost Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always
Difficult program of study					
Concern that my program of study might be irrelevant to my work upon return to home country					
Inadequate admin/staff support from the department					
Insufficient admin/staff support from the university					
Difficulty understanding how an American university works					
Difficulty building academic relationships with faculty					
Difficulty understanding my instructors in class					

To what extent has the stress caused by the academic environment affected negatively your academic performance?

- (1) No impact _____
 (2) To some extent _____
 (3) To a great extent _____

Section IV. Orientation before/after travel to the United States

Before you started your studies in the United States, how often would you say you felt stressed because of:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Almost Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always
Difficulty accessing information about studying here	1	2	3	4	5
Limited training to improve English					
Inadequate assistance with paperwork (social security card, driver license)					

(continued)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Almost Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always
Inadequate assistance with housing					
Inadequate assistance with finding schools and day care for children					

To what extent has the stress caused by the inadequate orientation affected negatively your academic performance?

- (1) No impact _____
 (2) To some extent _____
 (3) To a great extent _____

Section V. Academic Performance

Please describe how frequently you have experienced the following since you started your studies in the United States?

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Almost Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always
Difficulty managing time	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulty completing individual homework assignments on time					
Difficulty working on group projects					
Earning below average grades (lower than B)					
Difficulty understanding the content being taught					
Difficulty remaining motivated					
Having problems with concentration					
Trouble sleeping					

Section VI. Demographics

I am a graduate student _____
 I am an undergraduate student _____

Name of University _____

I am: Male _____ Female _____

How old are you?

18-22 _____

23 -30 _____

31-40 _____

41+ _____

Your marital status:

Single _____

Married _____

Divorced _____

If you are married, how many children you have? _____

How are you funding your education? (Please select all that apply).

Saudi Government _____

Personal/Family Funds _____

Institutional Scholarship or Assistantship _____

Other _____

How long have you lived in the Unites States?

Less than one year _____

1-3 years _____

3 years or longer _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol for Faculty and Deans

My name is Fahad Alsharari. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership department at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia, currently working on my doctoral dissertation entitled: “An Analysis of Factors that Impact Saudi students’ Learning Outcomes in American Higher Education Institutions: Exploration of Faculty, Administrators’, and Students’ perceptions.” It is with great pleasure that I am inviting you and other educators at CAU to participate in my research.

The purpose of my research is to capture, analyze and describe the challenges encountered by Saudi students enrolled at U.S. universities and to describe the support provided by faculty and administrators to Saudi students at an HBCU.

This consent form is to request your participation in a 45-60 minute interview with the researcher at a time and location that is most convenient for you. The anticipated benefit of this study is to provide insight into the challenges encountered by Saudi students enrolled at CAU. It is hoped that the results of this research will help the university improve the academic and social support provided to Saudi students at CAU. The direct anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the University.

All information is confidential and every effort will be made to protect your identity. Information you provide on the consent form and in the interview will be stored separately from data. The researcher’s dissertation chair may have access to all data collected for the duration of the research. Your individual information and data will not be reported. Only the results of all participants as a group will be documented. The final research report will not include any identifying information. All data and documentation collected will be destroyed upon completion of this study. If you have any questions, you may contact myself by email at fahad.alsharari@students.cau.edu or my Chair, Dr. Daniel Teodorescu at dteodorescu@cau.edu.

I voluntarily consent to participate in this study titled “An Analysis of Factors that Impact Saudi students’ Learning Outcomes in American Higher Education Institutions: Exploration of Faculty, Administrators’, and Students’ perceptions.”

NAME

SIGNATURE

DATE

Cultural Differences

1. Have you or your faculty noticed any Saudi students with an English language barrier in written assignments and/ or discussions during class? Please explain.
 - (a) If so, how do these the language barriers affect students’ academic performance?
 - (b) How can the university better support the Saudi to improve their English language proficiency?
2. What has your school done to help Saudi students adjust to the American culture?
3. What has your school done to demonstrate sensitivity toward and accommodate the religious needs of the Saudi students?
4. What has your school done to address potential issues of discrimination against Saudi students?

Social Integration

5. Describe the interaction between staff/administrators and students. Have you noticed and strained relations? If so, how do these strained relationships affect students’ academic performance?
6. Describe any social events your school organized for Saudi students and their families. How can these activities be improved?
7. Describe any efforts either in the classes or outside the classes to create opportunities for Saudi students to interact with American students. How can these efforts be improved?

Satisfaction with the Academic Environment

8. Describe any changes you made to your program or courses to improve the relevancy of the educational experience for Saudi students upon return to their country.

9. Have you or other faculty in the school noticed that Saudi students have difficulty following instructors in class?
10. Do you think the administrative support provided to Saudi students is adequate? If not, what needs to be improved?
11. Do you think Saudi students are given adequate opportunities to build quality mentorship relations with faculty in your school? If not, what needs to be improved?

Orientation

12. Does the school have in place an orientation for new Saudi students? If so, please describe any assistance in getting them settled before the start of the academic year.
13. How can the school improve the orientations and support to the new Saudi students once they arrive to Atlanta?

REFERENCES

- Abukhattala, I. (2013). What Arab students say about their linguistic and educational experiences in Canadian universities. *International Education Studies*, 6(8), 31.
- Akanwa, E. E. (2015). International students in western developed countries: History, challenges, and prospects. *Journal of International Students*, 5(3), 271.
- Alhazmi, A., & Nyland, B. (2013). The Saudi Arabian international student experience: From a gender-segregated society to studying in a mixed-gender environment. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(3), 346-365.
- Al Murshidi, G. A. (2014). Participation challenges of Emirati and Saudi students at US universities. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 3(5), 33-52.
- Al MUSAITEER, S. S. (2015). *Saudi students' experience of intercultural communication* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Akron, Akron, OH.
- Argyle, M., & Kendon, A. (1967). The experimental analysis of social performance. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 3, pp. 55–98). New York: Academic Press.

- Bailey, S. (2006). *Academic writing: A handbook for international students*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Campbell, K., & Prins, E. (2016). Taking initiative and constructing identity: international graduate student spouses' adjustment and social integration in a rural university town. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 35(4), 430-447.
- Crawford, I., & Wang, Z. (2016). The impact of placements on the academic performance of UK and international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(4), 712-733.
- Deshpande, S. P., & Viswesvaran, C. (1992). Is cross-cultural training of expatriate managers effective? A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 16, 295-310.
- Elgimari, A., Alshahrani, S., & Al-shehri, A. (2017, October). Homework system development with the intention of supporting Saudi Arabia's vision 2030. In *AIP Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 1891, No. 1, p. 020038). Melville, NY: AIP Publishing.
- Eze, S. C., & Ingelbedion, H. (2015). Key factors influencing academic performance of international students in UK Universities: A preliminary investigation. *British Journal of Education*, 3(5), 55-68.
- Folkman, S. (2001). Revised coping theory and the process of bereavement. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, & H. Schut (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: Consequences, coping, and care* (pp. 563-584). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Freeman, C. W., Zogby, J., Goldenberg, I., & Hyman, G. F. (2016). The middle east and the next administration: Challenges, opportunities and recommendations. *Middle East Policy*, 23(4), 5-41.
- Furnham, A. & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environment*. London: Methuen.
- Ghaffari, N. (2009). Beyond 9/11: American Muslim youth transcending pedagogies of stigma to resilience. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A. Humanities and Social Sciences*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/622102560?accountid=15099>
- Ghaffari, N. (2011). *Beyond 9/11: American Muslim youth transcending pedagogies of stigma to resilience*. New York: BiblioBazaar.
- Gu, Q., Schweisfurth, M., & Day, C. (2010). Learning and growing in a ‘foreign’ context: Intercultural experiences of international students. *Compare: A Journal of Competitive and International Education*, 40(1), 7-23.
- Houshmand, S., Spanierman, L. B., & Tafarodi, R. W. (2014). Excluded and avoided: Racial microaggressions targeting Asian international students in Canada. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 20(3), 377.
- Karaman, M. A., & Watson, J. C. (2017). Examining associations among achievement motivation, locus of control, academic stress, and life satisfaction: A comparison of US and international undergraduate students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 111, 106-110.

- Koo Moon, H., Kwon Choi, B., & Shik Jung, J. (2012). Previous international experience, cross-cultural training, and expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment: Effects of cultural intelligence and goal orientation. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 23(3), 285-330.
- Lee, E. L. (2007). Linguistic and cultural factors in East Asian students' oral participation in us university classrooms. *International Education*, 36(2), 27.
- Lee, J. Y., & Ciftci, A. (2014). Asian international students' socio-cultural adaptation: Influence of multicultural personality, assertiveness, academic self-efficacy, and social support. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 38, 97-105.
- Li, G., Chen, W., & Duanmu, J. L. (2010). Determinants of international students' academic performance: A comparison between Chinese and other international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 14(4), 389-405.
- Lin, S. Y., & Scherz, S. D. (2014). Challenges facing Asian international graduate students in the US: Pedagogical considerations in higher education. *Journal of International Students*, 4(1), 16-33.
- Mak, A. S., Brown, P. M., & Wadey, D. (2014). Contact and attitudes toward international students in Australia: Intergroup anxiety and intercultural communication emotions as mediators. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology*, 45(3), 491-504.
- Metz, G. W. (2002). *Challenges and changes to Tinto's persistence theory*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No: ED471529.

- Milem, J. F., & Berger, J. B. (1997). A modified model of college student persistence: Exploring the relationship between Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto's of student departure. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38, 387-400.
- Misra, R., & Castillo, L. G. (2004). Academic stress among college students: Comparison of American and international students. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 11(2), 132-148.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7, 177-82.
- Orth, A. M. (2015). *International students' perceptions of their experience of higher education in Australia: A focus on Saudi Arabian students in their first year of a business course in a major Australian university* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Brisbane, Australia: Queensland University of Technology.
- Rienties, B., Héliot, Y., & Jindal-Snape, D. (2013). Understanding social learning relations of international students in a large classroom using social network analysis. *Higher Education*, 66(4), 489-504.
- Rienties, B., Beausaert, S., Grohnert, T., Niemantsverdriet, S., & Kommers, P. (2012). Understanding academic performance of international students: The role of ethnicity, academic and social integration. *Higher Education*, 63(6), 685-700.
- Rienties, B., & Nolan, E. M. (2014). Understanding friendship and learning networks of international and host students using longitudinal social network analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 41, 165-180.

- Rienties, B., & Tempelaar, D. (2013). The role of cultural dimensions of international and Dutch students on academic and social integration and academic performance in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37(2), 188-201.
- Robinson-Pant, A. (2009). Changing academies: exploring international PhD students' perspectives on 'host' and 'home' universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(4), 417-429.
- Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM). (2018). Welcome to the SACM. *Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the USA*. Retrieved from: <http://www.sacm.org/>
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699-713.
- Stromquist, N. P., & Monkman, K. (Eds.). (2014). *Globalization and education: Integration and contestation across cultures*. New York: R&L Education.
- Tan, T. J., & Winkelman, C. (2014). The contribution of stress level, coping styles and personality traits to international students' academic performance. *Australian Catholic University, Locked Bag*, 4115.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures for student attrition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Tran, L. N. (2011). *Holding on to Vietnam: Motivation and the acculturation experience of Vietnamese international students in Australia*. Kensington, Australia: University of New South Wales.
- Ward, C., Okura, Y., Kennedy, A., & Kojima, T. (1998). The u-curve on trial: A longitudinal study of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transition. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 22, 277–91.
- Williams, C. T., & Johnson, L. R. (2011). Why can't we be friends? Multicultural attitudes and friendships with international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(1), 41-48.
- Woodall, T., Hiller, A., & Resnick, S. (2014). Making sense of higher education: Students as consumers and the value of the university experience. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(1), 48-67.
- Wu, H. P., Garza, E., & Guzman, N. (2015). International student's challenge and adjustment to college. *Education Research International*, 2015. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2015/202753>
- Yakunina, E. S., Weigold, I. K., Weigold, A., Hercegovac, S., & Elsayed, N. (2013). International students' personal and multicultural strengths: Reducing acculturative stress and promoting adjustment. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 91(2), 216-223.
- Zhang, J., & Goodson, P. (2011). Predictors of international students' psychosocial adjustment to life in the United States: A systematic review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(2), 139-162.

Zhang, Y. (2016). International students in transition: Voices of Chinese doctoral students in a US research university. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 175-194.